SPECIAL REPORT: UNITED NATIONS AT 75:
The relationship between the Commonwealth and the UN
PAGES 218-247
**Calendar of Forthcoming Events**

Updated as at 24 August 2020

Please note that due to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) global pandemic, many events, conferences and activities have been postponed or cancelled. Please check online or email hq.sec@cpahq.org for the latest information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Location/Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 17-18</td>
<td>13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament, Vienna, Austria (IPU Conference online)</td>
<td>Vienna, Austria</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 19-21</td>
<td>Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, Vienna, Austria (IPU Conference online)</td>
<td>Vienna, Austria</td>
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<td>August 18-22</td>
<td>Mid-Year meeting of the CPA Executive Committee, London/online</td>
<td>London/online</td>
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<td>September 15</td>
<td>International Day of Democracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 23-25</td>
<td>CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Regional Conference – online meeting</td>
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**2021**

August 2021

65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

The following events have been postponed to next year (2021) with final dates to be confirmed:
- 51st CPA Africa Regional Conference, Abuja, Nigeria
- 49th CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Regional Conference, Valletta, Malta
- 58th CPA Canada Regional Conference, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
- 45th CPA Caribbean, Americas & Atlantic Regional Conference, Providenciales, Turks & Caicos
- 39th CPA Pacific and Australia Regional Conference, Kiribati
- CPA Pacific and Australia Region Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference (POCC), Fiji
- Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), Kigali, Rwanda including: Commonwealth Youth Forum; Commonwealth Women’s Forum; Commonwealth People’s Forum; and Commonwealth Business Forum

The CPA calendar fosters the exchange of events and activities between CPA Regions and Branches. For further information on any events, please contact the CPA Branch concerned or the CPA Headquarters Secretariat. CPA Branch Secretaries are asked to send notices of CPA events to hq.sec@cpahq.org in advance of the publication deadline to ensure the calendar is accurate.

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**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) exists to connect, develop, promote and support Parliamentarians and their staff to identify benchmarks of good governance, and implement the enduring values of the Commonwealth.

Visit [www.cpahq.org/cpahq/SBclimatechange](http://www.cpahq.org/cpahq/SBclimatechange) to download a copy or email hq.sec@cpahq.org.

**THE CPA MODEL LAW FOR INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTS**

Based on the important values laid down in the Commonwealth Latimer House Principles and the Doctrine of the Separation of Powers, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) has created a Model Law for Independent Parliaments. This draft legislation is aimed at Commonwealth Parliaments to use as a template to create financially and administratively independent institutions. Specifically, the Model Law enables Parliaments to create Parliamentary Service Commissions and to ensure Parliaments across the Commonwealth have the resources they need to function effectively without the risk of Executive interference.

Visit [www.cpahq.org/cpahq/modellaw](http://www.cpahq.org/cpahq/modellaw)
| CONTENTS: THE PARLIAMENTARIAN | 2020: ISSUE THREE |

**PAGE 208**

**VIEWS & COMMENT**

**Editor’s Note**
UN at 75, The Commonwealth and the United Nations
Page 196

**View from the CPA Chairperson**
Celebrating International Day of Parliamentarism and marking the 75th anniversary of the United Nations
Page 198

**View from the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP)**
Financial Inclusivity for Women in the Commonwealth
Page 200

**View from the CPA Small Branches Chairperson**
Celebrating the 75th anniversary of the United Nations
Page 202

**View from the CPA Secretary-General**
The UN’s SDGs are at the heart of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association’s mission
Page 204

**NEWS & PHOTOS**

**CPA News**
News reports include:
- New CPA Secretary-General appointed
- Anguilla House of Assembly benefit from CPA’s first ever virtual Post-Election Seminar
- Botswana virtual workshop on effective parliamentary oversight
- CPA Masterclass videos on remote working for AIPs
- Virtual graduation ceremony for Commonwealth Parliamentarians with McGill University
- CPA launches its Model Law for Independent Parliaments
- Promoting biodiversity in Small Island Developing States at CPA and UNESCOS webinars
- Importance of the SDGs highlighted to Commonwealth Scholars

**Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians News and Events**
Reports from CPA activities around the Commonwealth
Pages 260-261

**PAGE 209**

**SPECIAL REPORT: UNITED NATIONS AT 75: THE COMMONWEALTH AND THE UN**

**Editorial**: The Commonwealth and the United Nations: Working together to tackle today’s global issues
Page 218

**The Commonwealth and the United Nations: 75 years of international symposiums**
International diplomat Sir Peter Marshall
Page 220

**The United Nations and its impact in Commonwealth countries: A View from the Speaker of India**
Executive Director of UN Women Page 226

**Making the UN more effective: A parliamentary perspective**
IFU Secretary General
Page 230

**The Future We Want, the UN We Need: Reaffirming our Collective Commitment to Multilateralism**
A view from UNDP
Page 234

**PAGE 210**

**FEATURE ARTICLES**

**SPECIAL REPORT: UNITED NATIONS AT 75: THE COMMONWEALTH AND THE UN**

**Reflections on the UN at 75 and the work of the UN Associations**
A view from Canada
Page 248

**Decriminalising the Electoral System in India: Reforms by the Judiciary**
Page 252

**Parliamentary expressions & practices**
Second of a three-part series on the language and practices in Westminster Parliaments
Page 255

**PAGE 212**

**PARLIAMENTARY REPORTS**

**Parliamentary Report**
Featuring legislative reports from Canada, Trinidad and Tobago, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia and India
Pages 262-279

**CPA DIRECTORY**
CPA Executive Committee Members, CWP and CPA Small Branches Steering Committee and CPA Regional Secretaries
Pages 280

**PAGE 217**

**çosde**

**100 years of publishing**

**The Parliamentarian 1920-2020**

**PAGE 255**

**FEATURE ARTICLES**

**UN Women’s 10th Anniversary**
Chair of the UNA-UK Youth Group
Page 255

**The Importance of Women in the Legislative Process**
Youth Engagement with Parliaments: View from the UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth
Page 260

**Inclusive, Collaborative Future**
Executive Director of UN Women
Page 263

**UN Women’s 10th anniversary, the future of gender equality and the empowerment of women in the Commonwealth**
Page 266

**PAGE 256**

**Additional Report**
Virtual graduation ceremony benefit from CPA's first ever virtual Post-Election Seminar
Page 272

**PAGE 258**

**REGIONAL REPORTS**

**Features legislative reports from Canada, Trinidad and Tobago, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia and India**
Pages 262-279

**APPLICATIONS**

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**Contributors**
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In 2020, the United Nations is commemorating its 75th anniversary, marking the anniversary of the signing of the UN Charter on 26 June 1945. This year, the UN will mark this anniversary on UN Day on 24 October 2020 and through observance ceremonies in New York, with a one-day high-level meeting of the UN General Assembly planned for Monday 21 September 2020 on the theme of ‘The Future We Want; the UN We Need: Reaffirming our Collective Commitment to Multilateralism’.

The United Nations is marking its 75th anniversary at a time of great disruption for the world, compounded by an unprecedented global health crisis with severe economic and social impacts. COVID-19 is a stark reminder of the need for cooperation across borders, sectors and generations.

Throughout their shared histories, the relationship between the United Nations and the Commonwealth has been co-operative and the common goals of both organisations have been apparent. The UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Commonwealth Charter have many shared aspirations. There are many global issues that require a response from both organisations including climate change, global inequality, gender equality, justice and human rights, youth engagement, technological development and population growth.

In this issue of The Parliamentarian, the Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Executive Committee, Hon. Emilia Monjowa Lifaka, MP (Cameroon) is her View article shares her message celebrating International Day of Parliamentarism in June 2020 and also marks the 75th anniversary of the United Nations.

The Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), Hon. Sharmaine Guluza Khan, MNA (Pakistan), writes about financial inclusivity for women in the Commonwealth and its importance for a more inclusive and sustainable development.

The CPA is delighted to publish an article by eminent former diplomat Sir Peter Marshall who has worked both with the Commonwealth Secretariat and the United Nations as he examines 75 years of international symbiosis between the Commonwealth and the United Nations.

The Speaker of the 17th Lok Sabha in the Parliament of India, Hon. Shri Om Birla writes about the impact of the United Nations in Commonwealth countries and in particular, about the relationship between India and the UN.

The Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Mr Martin Chungong writes about making the United Nations more effective and the need for greater inclusion of Parliamentarians in its decision making and policy processes.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has carefully focused on the delivery of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in its global work and in their joint article, Mr Charles Chauvel, UNDP Global Lead, Inclusive Processes and Ms Agata Walczak, UNDP Parliamentary Project Manager examine ‘The Future We Want; the UN We Need: Reaffirming our Collective Commitment to Multilateralism’.

United Kingdom Parliamentarian, Lord Stewart Wood of Anfield reflects on the United Nations at 75 and looks at the institution from the perspective of an academic, a Parliamentarian and as the Chair of a UN Association (UNA-UK).

The importance of youth engagement with Parliaments is critical to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the United Nations Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, Ms Jayathma Wickramanayake gives her perspective.

Both the UN and the Commonwealth have highlighted gender equality in their global goals and in this issue of The Parliamentarian, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka writes about the power of women’s leadership and its importance for a more inclusive and collaborative future.

The future of gender equality and the empowerment of women in the Commonwealth as well as marking UN Women’s 10th anniversary and the work of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) is highlighted in an article by the CPA Secretariat- General, Ms Bénédite Dibatoka.

In addition to celebrating the UN at 75, this issue of The Parliamentarian also examines other current issues in the Commonwealth.

The Education portfolio is one of the most important in the United Nations’ history of some of the parliamentary expressions and practices used in Commonwealth Legislatures and focuses on the different colours of the Commonwealth Parliaments; promoting biodiversity policies in Small Island Developing States at the CPA Small Branches and UNESCO joint webinars; and the CPA launching its Model Law for Independent Parliamentary Oversight.

The CPA news reports in this issue include: the appointment of the new CPA Secretary-General; the Angullu House of Assembly benefiting from the CPA’s first ever virtual pre-election seminar; the Parliament of Botswana virtual workshop on effective parliamentary oversight; the launch of CPA Masterclass videos on remote working for MPs; a virtual graduation ceremony for Commonwealth Parliamentarians with McGill University in Canada; the CPA launching its Manual Law for Independent Parliaments; promoting biodiversity policies in Small Island Developing States at the CPA Small Branches and UNESCO joint webinars; and the importance of the SDGs highlighted to Commonwealth Scholars.

This issue also features news and reports of Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) activities including the CWP Chairperson joining a UN Women Pakistan webinar on supporting women entrepreneurs; the CPA reaffirming its core priority of promoting gender equality in Parliaments; it releases new three-year strategic plans; CWP members from Pakistan, Western Australia and UK highlight ‘shadow pandemic’ of domestic abuse; Commonwealth Women Speakers at 11th Global Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament; CWP New Zealand supporting multi-Member Bill on FGM that is set to become law and new sculpture project commemorating women MPs at the New Zealand Parliament.

The Parliamentary Report and Third Reading section in this issue includes parliamentary and legislative news from Canada Federal; Trinidad and Tobago; India, New Zealand, United Kingdom; and Australia Federal.

The CPA Headquarters Secretariat would also like to thank Dr Jagdev-Sahu, Director at the Lok Sabha Secretariat for his dedication and commitment as the parliamentary correspondent for the Parliament of India for The Parliamentarian for the last 20 years and for his parliamentary service to the Lok Sabha Secretariat on his retirement. His parliamentary reports and articles about the Parliament of India for the last 20 years have provided a record of events for future generations and a source of interest for other Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures who want to share their experiences of parliamentary democracy.

We look forward to hearing your feedback and comments on this issue of The Parliamentarian, on the issues affecting Parliamentarians across the Commonwealth and to receiving your future contributions to this publication.
CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PARLIAMENTARISM AND MARKING THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNITED NATIONS

View from the CPA Chairperson

The International Day of Parliamentarism is celebrated every year on 30 June. The Day was established in 2018 through a United Nations General Assembly Resolution. Celebrating an international day for Parliamentarians and Parliaments is a unique opportunity for organisations like the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). With our membership of over 17,000 Parliamentarians spread across 180 Legislatures, we must use this opportunity to take stock of the importance of parliamentary democracy and its value to our societies and our global community. I would like to use this important day to focus on adaption and diversity. Adaption was a key theme for our recent Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference held in Uganda in September last year. At that time, over 500 Parliamentarians were able to come together to share ideas, build networks and learn from one another. But now the Commonwealth is facing one of its greatest challenges in tackling the COVID-19 global pandemic. Parliamentarians are now focusing their minds on creating safe and secure environments for their countries and constituencies. To succeed in this endeavour, Parliamentarians and our Parliaments have had to embrace rapid and uncertain change in the form of technical, social and cultural adaptions; from how we communicate and travel to the ways in which we legislate, represent and scrutinise governments. As such, adapting to new ways of working is essential. If we are to be adaptive, innovative and have the tools needed to overcome the challenges we face today and in the future, we must have a diversity of voices and people sharing ideas, building networks and learning from one another. When one voice is stifled, we are all weakened.

Recently, I have been struck by the Black Lives Matter movement that was started in the United States and has now spread across the globe - a movement that at its heart is about tackling racism and division. What this has reinforced in me, is that nobody should be left behind and nobody should be silenced because of the colour of their skin, their gender, age, ethnicity, religion, language, culture, sexuality or abilities. These values are at the heart of what the Commonwealth stands for. This was reflected in this year’s Commonwealth Day theme ‘Delivering a Common Future: Connecting, Innovating, Transforming’. The message is clear; together we are stronger, and together we can overcome our greatest challenges.

Within the CPA, we champion these principles in enabling women and disabled Parliamentarians to work collaboratively through the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) and Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) networks as well as those from small jurisdictions via the CPA Small Branches network.

As Parliamentarians, we are the representatives of our communities, and as such, we must speak for all those who might be at a potential disadvantage because of their perceived differences and the negative prejudices of others. Even if we as representatives are not reflective of the diversity of our people, we must as Parliamentarians still speak for all and ensure their views, ideas and knowledge can be voiced in the Chambers of our Parliaments, in the meeting rooms of government departments or on the streets of our constituencies. “As Parliamentarians, we are the representatives of our communities, and as such, we must speak for all those who might be at a potential disadvantage because of their perceived differences and the negative prejudices of others. Even if we as representatives are not reflective of the diversity of our people, we must as Parliamentarians still speak for all and ensure their views, ideas and knowledge can be voiced in the Chambers of our Parliaments, in the meeting rooms of government departments or on the streets of our constituencies."

remind us what our duties are as Parliamentarians and to those we serve. As the United Nations celebrates its 75th anniversary and we mark the UN’s many successes, we are also reminded of the great disruption for the world at present, compounded by an unprecedented global health crisis with severe economic and social impacts and the role that international organisations can play. We must ensure that we continue the international dialogue, and when we can come together again, that we discuss our priorities as a global family and how we can build a better future for all. The global COVID-19 pandemic is a clear reminder of the need for international cooperation across borders, sectors and even generations. The global response will determine how fast the world recovers, whether the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals are achieved, and how well the global community combats the many challenges that we face; from the climate crisis to future pandemics, inequalities in our societies and new forms of violence, and the huge changes in technology and population growth. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association encourages the greater engagement of Parliaments and Parliamentarians in UN decision-making processes and in the work of the UN agencies, and the CPA Headquarters Secretariat is further facilitating this through its networks. For example, the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) is working with UN Women in many areas of gender equality and the CPA Small Branches network is partnering with UNESCO’s Small Islands and Indigenous Knowledge Section on a number of new initiatives including biodiversity and climate change. The CPA will continue to promote international partnerships and to support Parliaments and Parliamentarians to play their role in the global dialogue. In many countries, public trust in traditional institutions like Parliaments is in decline and across the world, relations between different countries have been tested. It is clear that the need for collective action is needed more than ever.

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Financial inclusion refers to efforts to make financial products and services accessible and affordable to all individuals and businesses regardless of their personal net worth or company size. Financial inclusion strives to remove the barriers that exclude people from participating in the financial sector and using these services to improve their lives. It is also called inclusive finance.2

Globally, it’s not lack of intention or legislation but often social norms that constrain women’s capacity to access and meaningfully use financial services. Greater access to financial services for women is considered a key enabler for ‘Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment’ from SDG 5, one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2030 of the United Nations. The momentum for financial inclusion of women is increasing rapidly, the World Bank’s Global Findex database reveals that although access to financial services for women has sharply increased since 2011, the financial inclusion gender gap in developing economies is still unchanged. It is also clear that full financial inclusion will not be possible without including women into the formal financial system.

The Importance of Gender Equality
Gender equality is both the ‘right thing’ and the ‘smart thing’ for all countries. In addition, the Commonwealth has been a strong advocate through its Declaration on Gender Equality and Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment. The gender gap varies widely across economies and regions among Commonwealth countries, the gender gap (women have fewer accounts than men) was the highest for India, Pakistan, Trinidad and Tobago, Mauritius, and Uganda. There is no significant gender gap in account penetration in some Commonwealth countries like New Zealand and Singapore.4

But the question arises as to why financial inclusivity is important for women in the Commonwealth? According to research by the McKinsey Global Institute advancing gender equality could unlock US$12 trillion of incremental GDP in 2025 with financial, and particularly digital inclusion, being among the key enablers for making progress on gender equality.4 Moreover, according to the World Bank’s 2018 Global Findex database reveals that although financial inclusion for women has sharply increased since 2011, the financial inclusion gender gap in developing economies is still unchanged. It is also clear that full financial inclusion will not be possible without including women into the formal financial system.

Some positive developments in the Commonwealth Africa is now the world’s second fastest growing region after Asia with annual GDP growth rates in excess of 5% over the last decade. However, despite the good economic growth shown, this has not translated into steady prosperity and better livelihoods for the majority of the population. Growth has gone to those who already have access to it.

The recent growth of mobile money (including forms of ‘branchless banking’) and digital financial services have allowed millions of people who are otherwise excluded from the formal financial system to perform financial transactions relatively cheaply, securely, and reliably. Mobile money has achieved the broadest success in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 16% of adults report having used a mobile phone in the past 12 months to pay bills or send money.5

In Kenya, where the pioneer M-Pesa service was commercally launched in 2007, 68% of adults report using mobile money and M-Shwari, which in 2015 boasted having some 10 million account holders. In East Africa, more than 35% of adults report using mobile money, and commercial banks such as Equity Bank (Kenya) Limited, Co-operative Bank of Kenya and Kenya Commercial Bank (KCB) are also very active players in this market.

Dimensions of women’s financial inclusion
What are then three key pillars of this magic pill which will enable millions of families across the Commonwealth to work their way out of poverty and the recent pandemic influenced difficulties affecting both finances and greater access to health services?

1. Access: This refers to the availability of formal financial products and services (savings, credit, insurance, mobile banking, etc.) and access to the physical proximity of these services, as well as their affordability.
2. Usage: This is the extent to which women make use of the products and services on offer, the rate and frequency of use, and the length of time that they continue to use the service.
3. Quality: Have the financial products and services been innovatively developed to meet the specific needs of the wide range of women clients, from entrepreneurs to farmers, and women in unpaid employment or poor women engaged in the informal economy?6

Barriers and constraints that women face in seeking to access financial products
The third and final part of this article will focus on the strategies and practical results achieved by nations in the Commonwealth and beyond on financial inclusion. However, for any framework, these must be derived from addressing country-specific constraints and gaps. The following is a brief outline of these constraints.

Legal and regulatory barriers: Legal obstacles include inheritance laws that disfavor daughters and wives, property rights that fail to protect women’s ownership and formal restrictions on women’s ability to open bank accounts and access credit. Some countries also interfere with the foundation and personal guarantees and may have weaker credit histories (‘reputational collateral’). Husbands’ adverse credit histories may discourage from applying for credit because of the anticipation of rejection. The rejection rate for loan applications has tended to be higher for women-owned businesses in the developing world, for instance, in one Commonwealth member where the rejection rate for loans to women-owned businesses is 2.5 times higher than that for men (Goldsmith Sachs, 2014).

Risk aversion: Women, especially in lower income groups, tend to be more cautious than men about the amount of financing and business risk they are willing to take on. It is clear that there are many challenges to closing the gender gap in financial inclusion and the current COVID-19 pandemic has certainly increased these challenges. However, it is clear that greater financial inclusion for women can act as an enabler of individual countries’ development and it can have an impact on economic growth, the reduction of inequality, greater business development and social inclusion for women.

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1. Author has selected or contributed to the research and compilation by Gerry Finnegan in this discussion paper for the Commonwealth Secretariat titled ‘Strategies for Women’s Financial Inclusion in the Commonwealth’
3. https://www.g20-insights.org/policy_briefs/financial-inclusion-for-women-a-way-forward/
4. World Bank, 2020
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13. https://www.g20-insights.org/key_briefs/financial-inclusion-for-women-a-way-forward/

CWP Chairperson speaks about supporting women entrepreneurs at UN Women webinar
The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Chairperson, Hon. Shandana Khair Khan, MLA has spoken about supporting women entrepreneurs and women in leadership positions at a UN Women Pakistan webinar on the ‘Impact of COVID-19 on Women’s Entrepreneurship: Challenges and Opportunities’. The CWP Chairperson was one of the number of key speakers from the Asia Region in an event supported by the African Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank. To view the webinar visit: https://bit.ly/3r95j6m
At the celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations Charter this year and as the CPA Small Branches Chairperson, I am honoured on behalf of the CPA Small Branches network to acknowledge, recognise and applaud the significance of the United Nations within the international community, especially among the most vulnerable communities. The United Nations Charter that was agreed on 26th June 1945, that calls to acknowledge, recognise and applaud the significance of the United Nations within the international community, especially among the most vulnerable communities. The United Nations Charter this year and as the CPA Small Branches Chairperson, I am honoured on behalf of the CPA Small Branches network to acknowledge, recognise and applaud the significance of the United Nations within the international community, especially among the most vulnerable communities.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a plan to address global challenges including poverty, inequality, food change, environmental degradation, peace and justice. Many of these were also pertinent 75 years ago on the signing of the UN Charter in San Francisco, USA. Every Branch within the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, including the CPA Small Branches network, also play a key role in the implementation of the SDGs, both at the national and international level. Significantly, Parliaments can provide crucial oversight towards ensuring governments make the necessary progress in meeting their national and international sustainable development commitments, and that importantly, any actions benefit all levels of society. Parliament also plays a role in ensuring that national budget decisions and the allocation of resources to ministries align with the SDGs. Importantly, the goals are interconnected and as Member States and Parliaments work towards their implementation, a holistic approach with rigorous monitoring, evaluation and reporting mechanisms is essential to ensure that “no one is left behind” and that they are achieved by the stated goal of 2030.

On a small jurisdiction - the Cook Islands - and in my role as CPA Small Branches Chairperson, I value the work done by the United Nations towards securing the sustainable development of those nations commonly labelled small island developing states (SIDS). Despite being among the smallest nations with the smallest populations, SIDS and other Small Branches are among the most affected by many of the world’s most critical challenges, including climate change, economic crisis, and more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Coming from a small jurisdiction - the Cook Islands - and in my role as CPA Small Branches Chairperson, I value the work done by the United Nations towards securing the sustainable development of those nations commonly labelled small island developing states (SIDS). Despite being among the smallest nations with the smallest populations, SIDS and other Small Branches are among the most affected by many of the world’s most critical challenges, including climate change, economic crisis, and more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic."

CPA Small Branches can bring voice to these challenges and give greater impetus for collective action to redress the imbalances. In particular, the Small Islands Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action Pathway (SAMOA Pathway) was adopted by the UN and its Member States, as a result of the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, held from 1-4 September 2014, in Apia, Samoa. The SAMOA Pathway identifies key priority areas that have been strongly aligned with the SDGs, with particular relevance for SIDS. Its preamble provides that “small islands developing states remain a special case for sustainable development in view of their unique and particular vulnerabilities” and also recognises “the ownership and leadership of small island developing states in overcoming these challenges, but stress that in the absence of international cooperation, success will remain difficult.”

In the Pacific region, many nations and parliaments have established partnerships with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office that provide Parliaments, parliamentarians and parliamentary staff with much needed capacity building support. The framework of the SDGs provides an important component of these programmes in addition to the various CPA workshops that have also been held in the region. The visibility of the SDGs within multilateral activities give strength to their overarching importance to all aspects of sustainable development. The CPA Small Branches network is also in a perfect position where Parliamentarians can be active in ensuring the implementation of the SDGs. To that end, I was proud, as CPA Small Branches Chairperson, to be involved in the CPA Small Branches Workshop on Sustainable Economic Development, held in January 2020 in Valletta, Malta. Delegates representing Small Branch legislatures took great interest in, and highlighted the importance of, a range of pressing topics for SIDS and Small Branches encapsulated in the SDGs, including education; energy independence; ocean management; climate change; and food security.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on island developing states (SIDS) especially in the areas of education; energy independence; ocean management; climate change and food security.

References:
THE UN’S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS ARE AT THE HEART OF THE COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION’S MISSION

View from the CPA Secretary-General

In 2015, the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development providing a comprehensive and demanding set of targets to tackle poverty, inequality and climate change. UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, has called for a ‘Decade of Action’ to deliver the SDGs by 2030. The global pandemic and its impact will make the job even harder, but I hope that this will serve to strengthen our resolve.

In my previous role as Chair of the United Kingdom’s House of Commons International Development Committee, we looked at the role of Parliaments in the implementation of the SDGs.

As part of this work we were keen to learn from international best practice. One of the countries which impressed us most was Uganda, including the important work of the Uganda Parliamentary Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals. I hope we can do more to learn from each other in the months and years ahead so that Parliaments across the Commonwealth can be effective champions of the SDGs.

SDGs is a commitment to ‘achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls’ and is an important tool for Parliaments to support them in ensuring a gender perspective in their work. The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network provides an invaluable platform reflecting the CPA’s commitment to gender equality. Under the leadership of the CWP Chairperson, Hon. Shandana Gulzar Khan, MNA (Pakistan), we aim to strengthen our work on gender through international partnerships with UN Women and others. Of course, it is incumbent on all Parliaments to promote SDG 5—both in their work on gender policy matters and in their organisational practices. Empowering women and girls is both a crucial goal in itself and is essential to the successful delivery of other Sustainable Development Goals including tackling extreme poverty (Goal One), promoting access to high-quality education for all (Goal Four) and achieving peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16).

SDG16 includes a commitment to ‘build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.’ This chimes well with the core mission of the CPA as we seek to strengthen the important role of Parliamentarians and Parliamentarians. In particular, the CPA’s Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures have proved themselves a vital tool (www.cpahq.org/cpahq/benchmarks) in July 2020, I was delighted to attend the first ever virtual CPA Post-Election Seminar with the newly elected House of Assembly in Angola. The Seminar was a huge success and built upon Angola’s self-assessment earlier this year using the CPA Benchmarks. Similar assessments have been undertaken, over the past two years, by Parliaments and CPA Branches including Ghana, Malaysia, Pakistan, Grenada, Belize, Kenya and South Africa. I look forward to working with other Parliaments across the Commonwealth to ensure the CPA family contributes fully to the implementation of Goal 16.

SDG4 aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” For me, education has always been a high priority and I know that this view is shared by Parliamentarians across the Commonwealth. Engagement with young people is a vital element of a healthy democracy. Both in preparing children and young people for their future as adult citizens and listening to them now as young citizens. I hope to build upon the work which the CPA has long undertaken to work with young people across the Commonwealth.

SDG13 commits the international community to “take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.” “Small Island Developing States (SIDS) have long been recognised as a priority for sustainable development. It is now almost three decades since the 1992 Rio UN Conference on the Environment and Development at which SIDS were identified as a ‘special case’ as they often bear the brunt of global challenges like climate change and environmental degradation. Earlier this year, in Malta, we saw the Chairperson of the CPA Small Branches Network and Speaker of the Cook Islands, Hon. Nik Rattle, launch the CPA Small Branches Climate Change Toolkit (www.cpahq.org/cpahq/SClimatechange). It is an impressive piece of work drawing upon collaborations with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Nairobi in 2018 and work undertaken by CPA Small Branches Parliamentarians who attended the workshop on climate change at the 37th CPA Small Branches Conference in Kampala, Uganda in September 2019.

In July 2020, I was pleased to attend one of two webinars hosted jointly by the CPA Small Branches Network and UNESCO on the subject of ‘The Role of SIDS, Legislators and Decision-Makers on Sustainable Development and Agenda 2030: Biodiversity’. I am confident that this is a great opportunity to develop this important work further in partnership with the United Nations and others.

The driving purpose of the SDGs is to “leave no-one behind.” People with disabilities face extra discrimination, stigma and prejudice. A good test of the impact of Agenda 2030 will be to look at how far the lives of people with disabilities improve. Disability-inclusion is addressed in several of the Goals, including SDG4 on education, SDG8 on inclusive and sustainable economic growth and SDG10 on inequality. ‘Nothing about us without us’ is a powerful slogan with a centuries-long tradition which has become a guiding principle of the disability rights movement.

The development of the CPA Disability and Inclusion (CpAD) network will provide an important platform to ensure that the CPA is truly promoting disability-inclusion, both in how we engage our Members and how we support all Parliamentarians to promote access and remove the barriers that people with disabilities in politics, the economy and wider society.

In recent months, the Black Lives Matter movement has focussed the world’s attention on the importance of tackling racism. As our CPA Chairperson, Hon. Emilia Monipi Lifatoka, said in her powerful statement on the 2020 International Day of Parliamentarians with reference to Black Lives Matter: “What this has reinforced in me, is that nobody should be left behind, nobody should be silenced because of the colour of their skin, their gender, age, ethnicity, religion, language, culture, sexuality or abilities.”

That commitment to inclusion and diversity lies at the heart of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and it is central to the mission, programmes and governance of the CPA itself. As work begins on the next phase of the CPA’s strategic planning, I welcome the opportunity to work with CPA Branches, Regions, Networks and individual Parliamentarians across the CPA family to help ensure that we make our contribution to the UN’s Agenda 2030.

A shared commitment to multilateralism lies at the heart of the CPA’s mission. I am delighted to join the Association as the Secretary-General at this critical and challenging time and I look forward to working with Parliamentarians across the Commonwealth in my new role. I am grateful to the members of the CPA Executive Committee for taking part in our first ever virtual meeting in August 2020. It proved very successful with a high level of participation by Parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth.

The COVID-19 global pandemic has had a devastating impact on families and communities throughout the world. Our thoughts are with all those who have lost loved ones as well as others who are living with or recovering from the virus. Rightly, we applaud the key workers whose hard work and dedication has sustained so many people’s lives. Applause, however, is not enough. Our shared challenge is to ensure that ‘Build Back Better’ is not an empty slogan but a genuine call to action.

The United Nations was born at the end of the Second World War with ambitious goals to achieve peace, uphold international law and defend human rights. As we mark the UN’s 75th anniversary, we have an opportunity and a responsibility to reaffirm our support for multilateralism. Parliamentarians and Parliamentarians have a crucial part to play as we seek to learn lessons from the past 75 years to help inform us in shaping policies for the years to come.

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The CPA Executive Committee announced on 15 June 2020 that they had appointed a new Secretary-General for the Association and that Mr Stephen Twigg was selected as the CPA Secretary-General. The CPA Executive Committee approved the new CPA Secretary-General acting in the capacity of the General Assembly, as mandated by the 64th General Assembly held in Kampala, Uganda on 28 September 2019. The CPA Executive Committee is made up of representatives from the nine regions of the CPA: Africa; Asia, Australia, British Islands and Mediterranean; Canada; Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic; India, Pacific; South-East Asia.

The Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee and Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Cameroon, Hon. Emilia Monjowa Lifaka, MP, said: “On behalf of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, we welcome the appointment of the new CPA Secretary-General, and the CPA Executive Committee and CPA Headquarters Secretariat looked forward to working with Mr Stephen Twigg to further the work of the Association in parliamentary strengthening across the Commonwealth. His long-standing parliamentary experience will be valuable to the Association.”

The new CPA Secretary-General’s appointment is for a fixed term of four years and began on 1 August 2020. The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg is a former UK Parliamentarian, who was elected to the Parliament of the United Kingdom as a Member of Parliament from 1997 to 2005 (Wirral South) and from 2010 to 2019 (Liverpool West Derby). During his parliamentary career, he held several senior positions including Chairperson of the International Development Select Committee, Minister for Schools and a senior position as Chairperson of the International Parliamentary Network for Education and has been actively involved in parliamentary strengthening with both Global Partners Governance and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD).

The CPA Chairperson, Hon. Emilia Monjowa Lifaka, MP held a virtual meeting of the CPA Co-ordinating Committee on 3 August 2020 to welcome the new CPA Secretary-General as he started his term of office this week. The CPA Chairperson welcomed the CPA Secretary-General and looked forward to working together to progress the Association’s role in promoting parliamentary democracy. The virtual meeting was also attended by the Vice-Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee, Hon. John Ajaka, MLC, President of the Legislative Council of the New South Wales Parliament and the CPA Treasurer, Hon. Datuk Seri Shamsul Iskandar bin Hj Mohd Akin, MP (Malaysia) as well as staff from the CPA Headquarters Secretariat.

The CPA Secretary-General thanked the CPA Chairperson and CPA Co-ordinating Committee for their welcome, thanked the CPA Director of Operations, Mr Jarvis Matiya for his work as Acting CPA Secretary-General for the past year and looked forward to working with the CPA Headquarters Secretariat staff on the wide range of CPA projects and events in the years ahead.

New Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association appointed

The CPA Executive Committee held virtual meeting to address key governance issues for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

The CPA Executive Committee, meeting virtually from 19 to 22 August 2020 chaired by the Chairperson of the Executive Committee, Hon. Emila Monjowa Lifaka, MP, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Cameroon. The CPA Executive Committee represents the nine regions of the CPA: Africa; Asia, Australia, British Islands and Mediterranean; Canada; Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic; India, Pacific; South-East Asia.

The CPA Executive Committee Mid-Year meeting was attended by representatives from all of the nine CPA Regions along with the Officers of the Association: the Vice-Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee, Hon. John Ajaka, MLC, President of the Legislative Council of New South Wales; CPA Treasurer, Hon. Datuk Seri Shamsul Iskandar bin Hj Mohd Akin, MP (Malaysia); CPA Small Branches Chairperson, Hon. Niki Rattle, Speaker of the Parliament of the Cook Islands; and the Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), Hon Shandana Gujarat Khan, MNA (Pakistan).

The CPA Executive Committee approved the postponement of annual gathering of Commonwealth Parliamentarians at 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Canada

The CPA Executive Committee, meeting virtually from 19 to 22 August 2020, has approved the postponement of the 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) due to be hosted by the CPA Canada Region in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada in January 2021.

The decision to postpone the CPA annual conference was the result of ongoing travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 global pandemic and the quarantine restrictions in place between different countries. The CPC will now be postponed to a future date in August 2021.

The largest annual gathering of Commonwealth Parliamentarians, the annual flagship event brings together over 500 Parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and decision makers from across the Commonwealth for a unique conference and networking opportunity. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference offers the prospect of the coming together of the CPA’s global membership to address the critical issues facing today’s Parliaments.

During the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, there will also be a number of additional conferences and meetings including 38th CPA Small Branches Conference; workshops for the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP); 65th CPA General Assembly, meetings of the CPA Executive Committee; and the Society of Clerks at the Table (SoCATT) meetings. The conference will also hold elections for the Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee for a new three-year term.

All eligible CPA Branches will be contacted with further information and invitations to the 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) in Canada. For further information and updates please visit www.cpahq.org/cpahq/65CPC.
Newly elected Members of the Anguilla House of Assembly benefit from Commonwealth expertise at the CPA’s first ever virtual Post-Election Seminar

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Secretary-General Elect, Mr Stephen Twigg addressed newly elected Members of the Anguilla House of Assembly at the opening of the CPA’s first ever virtual Post-Election Seminar from 20 to 24 July 2020. The Seminar, which is the CPA’s longest running programme, was delivered for the first-time virtually with panelists presenting from across the Commonwealth, due to travel restrictions in place during the COVID-19 global pandemic.

The CPA Secretary-General Elect, Mr Stephen Twigg said: “The CPA is pleased to work with the House of Assembly in the delivery of this important and worthwhile programme to support the strengthening of democracy and good governance in Anguilla. Delivering this programme through a virtual platform highlights Anguilla’s forward-thinking and adaptive approach to new ways of working in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. This clearly demonstrates a positive future for democracy on the island.”

The opening ceremony of the CPA Post-Election Seminar also heard speeches from the new Speaker of the House, Hon. Barbara Webster-Bourne, the CPA UK CEO, Mr Jon Davies and the Governor of Anguilla, His Excellency Tim Foy OBE. To view highlights of the opening ceremony, please visit www.cpahq.org/cpahq/youtTube.

The CPA Post-Election Seminar provided a valuable opportunity to help shape the parliamentary careers of the newly elected and returning Members of the House to develop their skills and understanding of parliamentary democracy. The programme covered areas focusing on parliamentary practice and procedure, administration and financing of Parliament, public outreach and engagement, the role of select committees as well as key Commonwealth values and principles, such as the Latimer House Principles on the Separation of Powers.

Key highlights included:
- Two highly experienced Commonwealth Parliamentarians from Bermuda and Canada – Hon. Dennis P. Lister, JP, MP, Speaker of the House of Assembly of Bermuda and Hon. Yasmin Ratansi MP, Parliament of Canada and Canada CPA Chairperson - shared their experiences of being a newly elected Member of Parliament.
- Parliamentary experts including Ms Jacqui Sampson-Miquel, Clerk of the House of Representatives, Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and Mr Lenox Proctor, Clerk of the House of Assembly of Anguilla examining the importance of updating Standing Orders and good practice for parliamentary procedures.
- A session was held for female MPs from Anguilla to discuss women’s representation and the work of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network with Hon. Yasmin Ratansi, MP (Canada) and Hon. Akierra Missick MP (Turks & Caicos Islands) who shared their own experiences of working in Parliament.
- Hon. D. Ezzard Miller, MLA (Cayman Islands), Chair of the Public Accounts Committee spoke about the importance of the legislative process and financial scrutiny.
- Hon. Akierra Missick MP (Turks & Caicos) and Hon. Sharie B. de Castro, MHA, Junior Minister for Tourism (British Virgin Islands) spoke about balancing government and parliamentary roles and the role of the leader.
- A session was also held for the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Anguilla House of Assembly that focused on the multifaceted role and function of the Presiding Officer, both within and outside the Chamber. The session heard from three distinguished current and former Commonwealth Speakers - Hon. Dennis P. Lister, JP, MP, Speaker of the House, Bermuda, Hon. Alix Boyd Knights, Speaker Emeritus, Dominica; Mr Terry Harrigan, former Speaker of the House of Assembly of Anguilla.

Members of the House also addressed key and urgent areas of parliamentary and electoral reform in Anguilla emanating from the recent CPA Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures report and the CPA BIMR Election Assessment Mission. The election for Members of the House of Assembly of Anguilla was held on 29 June 2020.

The CPA Headquarters Secretariat delivered the programme in partnership with the House of Assembly of Anguilla, the Government of Anguilla and the CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Regional Secretariat (CPA UK Branch).

Images of CPA Post-Election Seminar in Anguilla at www.cpahq.org/cpahq/youtube.

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association joins global webinar highlighting the vital role of the Commonwealth networks

The CPA Acting Secretary-General, Mr Jarvis Matiya delivered the keynote address at a global online webinar titled ‘Vanguards in the 21st century: Optimising Commonwealth Networks’. The CPA Acting Secretary-General highlighted the key role that Commonwealth organisations play in the international community and the role of the CPA as the parliamentary wing of the Commonwealth in connecting over 180 Parliaments and Legislatures. He said: “Through the ongoing work of the Commonwealth, citizens can reap the benefits that come from positive dialogue and engagement on issues of democracy, good governance, human rights and socio-economic development. Through collaboration, consultation and speaking with one common voice, the Commonwealth is truly a global force for good, bringing a richness of its diversity and geographical reach to solve issues and identify new opportunities.”

The online webinar was held as part of a series hosted by Global Policy Insights (GPI) and The Ramphal Institute and the session featured a panel discussion on the Commonwealth’s pivotal networks as they partner with each other and their national counterparts to deliver upon the Commonwealth’s priorities. Guest panelists included: Mr Uday Nagaraj from Global Policy Insights; Mr David Gomez, Director of The Ramphal Institute; Ms Anne T. Gallagher, Director-General of the Commonwealth Foundation; Dr Greg Murto, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF); Dr Nicholas Watts, Chair of the Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations (IFCO); and Ms Neha Dewan, Political Affairs Officer at GPI and the Project Lead for the Commonwealth Project.

To view the online webinar and to find out more about the webinar series hosted by Global Policy Insights (GPI) and The Ramphal Institute please visit http://globalpolicyinsights.org/ or http://www.ramphalinstute.org/.
Remote working during the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic: CPA Masterclass videos equip Commonwealth Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff with practical techniques

Three new CPA Masterclass videos have been launched by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to equip Commonwealth Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff with practical techniques to effectively plan and manage parliamentary responsibilities.

The confinement restrictions currently in place in countries across the world as a result of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) has not only driven many into a state of emergency but, has consequently impacted the work of hundreds of Parliaments. Almost immediately, overtime, Parliaments and Legislatures within the Commonwealth have had to prioritise the health and safety of their Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, as well as those of their communities and families by encouraging Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff to work from home.

Many are still adjusting to changes to the working environment and experience challenges when conducting meetings and holding Parliamentary Committees and questions virtually. Now more than ever, Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff are required to strengthen their soft skills and effectively continue to fulfill their parliamentary responsibilities and commitments away from the parliamentary building and its facilities.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) has embarked on a partnership with experts in the field of business administration and personal development to launch a series of videos as part of a set of CPA Masterclasses on Remote Working. Produced by Kate Faragher, Chief Executive Officer of BeSpoke Skills, and Claire Farren, Chief Executive Officer of Farrens, these CPA Masterclasses provide Parliamentarians with guidance and recommendations on how to effectively work remotely during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Divided into three courses: Virtual Presenting, Time Management and Questioning, Parliamentarians will not only be able to implement the knowledge shared into their current routines but, will also have the opportunity to transfer these skills in all aspects of their work beyond these current circumstances.

The CPA Acting Secretary-General, Mr. Javits Matiya said: “The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association recognises the important role collaboration plays in advancing parliamentary democracy across the Commonwealth and will continue to be a platform that connects, develops and supports the work of Parliamentarians and Parliaments. The CPA Masterclass Courses on Remote Working and other innovative activities have been inspired by the current need for Parliamentarians to impact and work towards delivering effective policies and scrutinising the Executive virtually during this time of great uncertainty. We hope that these CPA Masterclasses will help develop parliamentary practices across the Commonwealth by offering Parliamentarians an awareness of the key tools needed to deliver their responsibilities in their respective Parliaments and Legislatures.”

Concerning the Masterclass on Questioning, Kate Faragher asserted that “great questions can uncover clear answers. In a time of upheaval clarity is key. This Masterclass will help you structure the best approach to getting the answers you need, now during the COVID-19 Pandemic and also when we return to the ‘new normal’.”

Regarding the Masterclass on Time Management, Claire Farren shared that “so many of us are struggling to juggles family life with work challenges - these easy steps followed consistently will give you the productivity mindset you’ve always wanted.”

Both Kate Faragher and Claire Farren said that the Masterclass on Virtual Presenting will “give you an online make-over and help you present yourself and your environment in the best way possible, using simple, easy-to-follow skills that will last you long after the pandemic has passed.”

To view the publication please visit: https://www.cpahq.org/cpahq/remoteworking to access the CPA Masterclass Courses on Remote Working and request a log-in.
Virtual graduation ceremony held for Commonwealth Parliamentarians from small jurisdictions completing CPA course with McGill University

Commonwealth Parliamentarians from across the world joined a virtual graduation ceremony for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Fundamentals Programme on Practice and Procedure for CPA Small Branches delivered in partnership with McGill University in Canada. The accredited programme for newly elected Parliamentarians provides guidance on international practices of parliamentary democracy with a particular focus on the smallest jurisdictions in the Commonwealth. The CPA Small Branches network operates in 43 Commonwealth jurisdictions.

The virtual graduation ceremony saw the presentation of the Professional Development Certificate in Parliamentary Governance to 12 Commonwealth Parliamentarians from Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Falkland Islands, Grenada, Isle of Man, Jersey, Nauru, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines and Turks and Caicos. The Chairperson of the CPA Small Branches network, Hon. Niki Rattle, Speaker of the Parliament of the Cook Islands sent a video message to the virtual graduation ceremony and said, “The purpose and design of the CPA’s Fundamentals Programme is to build the skills and capacities of Parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth by providing a deeper understanding and appreciation of parliamentary practices and procedures. It is one of the strengths of the CPA and the Small Branches network that we are able to provide these peer-to-peer learning opportunities and I warmly encourage graduates to share what you have gained from your experience of this course. The importance of democratic governance and good governance are not tied to specific areas of our shared Commonwealth but are universal and vital maxims at the centre of the work that we carry out.”

The CPA Secretary-General Elect, Mr Stephen Twigg congratulated the graduates and said, “The CPA Fundamentals Programme on Practice and Procedure for CPA Small Branches is a very important part of the CPA’s offer to our Members. It contributes to our core mission of strengthening democratic Legislatures across the Commonwealth and beyond. It is also hugely encouraging to hear of the many success stories and achievements of the graduates on the programme. The CPA is committed to this programme being widely accessible as continuous learning for Commonwealth Parliamentarians.”

Dr Carola Weil, Dean of Continuing Studies at McGill University in Canada also congratulated the participants on completing the course and for their dedication to promoting transparency and accountability in their respective Parliaments. The Dean was joined at the virtual graduation ceremony by Professor Rick Stapenhurst, Director of Parliamentary Programmes at McGill University, Mrs Irina Popova, Director of Professional & Corporate Education at McGill School of Continuing Studies and Mr Matthew Salik, Head of Parliamentary Development at the CPA. The vote of thanks on behalf of the graduates was given by Hon. Donald L. Saunders, Deputy Speaker of The Bahamas who thanked participants, lecturers and everyone involved in the programme.

The CPA Headquarters Secretariat provided funding for many of the participants on the course. For further information about the CPA’s professional development programmes for Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff email: hj.sarc@cpahq.org.

Online webinar discusses MPs’ communication with constituents during COVID-19

Three Members of Parliament from Canada, Jamaica and the UK joined a live webinar event held by the CPA UK Branch on the topic of ‘How can MPs continue to communicate with their constituents during COVID-19?’ The event explored how MPs across the Commonwealth and, in some cases their parliamentary staff, have adapted to virtual surgeries, losing their office space and the change in pace of work since lockdown measures have been introduced across the globe and how they have ensured that they are still able to engage effectively with their constituents. The panelists were: Hon. Yasmin Ratansi, MP, Member of the Parliament of Canada and CPA Canada Chairperson; Hon. Dawn Butler, MP, Member of the UK Parliament; and Hon. Dr Dayton Campbell, MP, Member of the Parliament of Jamaica. They discussed how they have had to adapt their communication methods to include more online and virtual ways of reaching out to people during lockdown and spoke of the challenges of higher numbers of constituents getting in touch and the importance of reaching out to those constituents who are hard to reach via radio programmes, telephone calls and social distancing meetings. Discussions also focused on the opportunities presented by using social media, including its popularity, real-time live interaction and the ease in sending messages remotely, as well as the challenges it can present through being unable to verify your constituents and the difficulty in engaging in conversation on platforms such as Twitter due to character restrictions.

Helping Parliament to gain greater independence from Governments – CPA launches its Model Law for Independent Parliaments

Today, more than ever, Parliaments are facing many challenges to their effectiveness. The current COVID-19 pandemic is stretching the capacity of Commonwealth Parliaments to remain fully functional, requiring costly resources and specialist services as well as the ability to be rapidly adaptive to new ways of working. To survive such pressures, Parliaments need to have robust leaders, services and finances to respond to such pressures.

As part of its commitment to the Commonwealth Latimer House Principles, as well as its work in benchmarking Parliaments against international standards, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) has developed a Model Law to help empower Parliaments to take control away from the Executive to ensure it has the administrative, operational and financial resources it needs to function effectively.

The Model Law is designed as a Parliamentary Service Commission Bill which seeks to create a parliamentary corporate body to oversee the institution of Parliament. It has also been structured to accommodate as many versions of the ‘Westminster System’ Parliament as possible. The Model Law can be adapted to suit unicameral or bicameral Parliaments, small or large Legislatures at either a national or sub-national level.

The Model Law has been developed with expert and experienced input from leading Commonwealth Legislative drafters and Parliamentary Clerks. The Acting CPA Secretary-General, Mr Jarvis Matiya said: “Since the establishment of the Commonwealth Latimer House Principles, over the last twenty years, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has been a leader in driving the agenda for strengthening the independence of Parliaments from the Executive, this Model Law is another important step in that process. It will undoubtedly be an invaluable resource for Commonwealth Parliaments that need to create such entities and a clear reminder to other Parliaments to continue to perfect their institutional independence.”

To download a copy of the CPA’s Model Law for Independent Parliaments please visit www.cpahq.org/cpahq/modellaw.

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association joins Caribbean-focused webinar on gender responsiveness and disaster resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Headquarters Secretariat joined a number of international partners for the ParlAmericas webinar on gender responsiveness and disaster resilience during COVID-19. The webinar was hosted in partnership with UN Women Caribbean and the Parliament of St Lucia and it brought together Parliamentarians, technical staff and representatives of civil society from across the Caribbean and Americas.

Jack Hardcastle, Progammes Assistant at the CPA Headquarters Secretariat spoke about the CPA’s toolkit on Climate Change and Small States (www.cpahq.org/cpahq/SBclimatechange) and the newly launched toolkit on parliamentary responses to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic (www.cpahq.org/cpahq/coronavirus). The CPA Small Branches network operates in 43 Commonwealth jurisdictions with 16 of them in the CPA Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region.

The ParlAmericas webinar was introduced by Tonni Brodber, Head of the UN Women Multi-Country Office for the Caribbean, who was followed by the Speaker of the House of Assembly of St Lucia, Hon. Andry Daniel, MP, Member of the Parliament’s Board of Directors and CAA Regional Representative on the CPA’s Executive Committee. The webinar also heard discussions on a wide range of issues in relation to gender-responsiveness and disaster resilience during COVID-19 from representatives of a wide range of organisations in the Caribbean Region including the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Caribbean Office.

Key role of Parliamentarians and policy makers in promoting biodiversity in Small Island Developing States is highlighted at CPA and UNESCO webinars

Global leaders and experts from across the world have highlighted the role of legislators and decision-makers in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) on biodiversity and the sustainable development agenda. Two online webinars were convened by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Small Branches network and UNESCO’s Small Islands and Indigenous Knowledge Section. These webinars aimed to build the knowledge of Commonwealth Parliamentarians and policy makers in small jurisdictions and to highlight the multiateral agreements and global instruments within UNESCO’s mandate of education, natural sciences, social and human sciences, culture, communication and information.

The first of the webinars focused on the CPA Pacific Region and was introduced by Hon. Niki Rattle, Chairperson of the CPA Small Branches network and Speaker of the Parliament of the Cook Islands who said: “In recognising the pioneering work undertaken by UNESCO in relation to Small Island Developing States and bringing to the challenges they face to the top table internationally, I believe there are mutual interests, common objectives and significant scope for partnership between the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association’s Small Branches network and UNESCO. The CPA Small Branches network aims to help our Members to identify their achievements, strategically assess the challenges they encounter, build alliances and take action across the Commonwealth and beyond.”

This message was reiterated by CPA Secretary-General, Mr Stephen Twigg who spoke at the second webinar focused on the Caribbean and Indian Oceans and highlighted the aspirations of the CPA Small Branches network to support Members in promoting biodiversity and in the aspirations of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The CPA Small Branches network operates in 43 Commonwealth jurisdictions with 16 of them in the CPA Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region and 9 in the CPA Pacific Region.

Dr Peggy Ot-Boaenteng, Director of the UNESCO Division for Science Policy and Capacity Building also spoke at the webinars about UNESCO’s work in biodiversity and its work with SIDS. Anna Maria Hernandez Salgar, Chair of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) explained how IPBES provides relevant information to policy and decision makers and how they support Parliamentarians with policy information. UNESCO’s Small Island and Indigenous Knowledge Chief, Nigel Crawford highlighted the importance of Parliamentarians in promoting legislation for biodiversity.

Participants and discussion leaders at the webinars went on to discuss strengthening dialogue between science and policy on biodiversity in the Pacific Ocean and in the Caribbean and Indian Oceans, as well as the capacity of Parliamentarians to associate biodiversity with development agendas.

Key highlights from the Caribbean/Indian Ocean webinar:

- The first speaker, environmental expert and IPBES Caribbean representative, Floyd Homer (Trinidad & Tobago) focused on the Caribbean Region and the national obligations for governments under the Convention on Biodiversity.
- Ms Amrithka Singh, Programme Manager for Sustainable Development at the CARICOM Secretariat gave a perspective from the Caribbean Region and in the Caribbean and Indian Oceans.
- Gina Bonne from the Indian Ocean Commission gave the perspective of biodiversity from the Small Island Developing States in the region and the challenges of protecting biodiversity in a region that is affected by economic and environmental factors.
- Iham Alho Mohamed, Assistant Director at the Ministry of Environment of the Maldives gave the biodiversity perspective from Maldives and the relevance of IPBES for policymakers, stakeholders and negotiations in the Indian Ocean Region.

These webinars are aimed at Parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and those working to promote legislative responses and international decision making with specific focus on Small Island Developing States.

To view the CPA/UNESCO webinars visit www.cpahq.org/cpahq/youtube.

New Commonwealth interim report provides reflections on democracy and development during postponed CHOGM 2020 week

Leaders of the Commonwealth’s 54 countries were due to meet in June 2020 in Kigali, Rwanda, at the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting has been postponed, however a new report has been launched to reinforce the values and aspirations of the Commonwealth and discuss shared goals of democracy and development.

The CHOGM 2020 Interim Report features perspectives from Commonwealth Heads of Government and global leaders on a range of topics including good governance, trade and economic growth, ICT, youth, education, and the environment.

The Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee, Hon. Emilia Monjowa Lifaka, MP, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Cameroon writes in the report in an article titled ‘Parliaments and Democracy in an Evolving Commonwealth’ about the important work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in supporting different Parliaments and Legislatures across the Commonwealth to develop fundamental democratic values and practices for the benefit of all.

The impact of COVID-19 dominates discussions in the report, with many authors calling for world leaders to put aside national self-interest and work collaboratively to minimise the devastating socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. The progress of the Sustainable Development Goals in this ‘Decade of Action’ also remains a key concern. Contributors include: The World Health Organisation; Commonwealth Secretariat; The Elders; World Economic Forum; UN Women; The Global Fund; Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; Commonwealth Pharmacists Association; and Commonwealth Nurses and Midwives.

The CHOGM 2020 Interim Report is published by Commonwealth Business Communications and is available download for free. Please visit the following website link to download a copy: http://www.commonwealthbc.com/publications/commonwealth-heads-of-government-interim-report#last_publication_downloaded=1660.

Commonwealth leaders from all 54 members issued a joint statement on the COVID-19 global pandemic on 16 July 2020 and outlined the steps that member states are taking to fight the pandemic and to work together in support of each other and broader global efforts. The joint statement committed to “working transparently and constructively within the Commonwealth family and with our international partners to address COVID-19 and its impacts; build resilience, particularly for developing economies and the most vulnerable countries; and ensure no one is left behind.”

The statement went on to outline actions under a number of key areas including:

- Upholding our Fundamental Principles
- Contributing to the Global Health Response
- Safeguarding our Future Prosperity
- Addressing International Trade Disruptions
- Protecting the Future of Small and Vulnerable States
- Global Cooperation and Multilateralism

Commonwealth leaders also noted that the pandemic is not the only challenge facing Commonwealth countries, with the report also highlighting the impact of climate change and the growing threat of climate change.

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland, QC said: “As the Coronavirus swept through the world spreading in ways we could not have imagined, the Commonwealth can be immensely proud of the way our leaders, governments and institutions have worked together to respond. And we should also be proud of the innovative partnerships and new approaches we have taken to protect our healthcare systems and the well-being of all our people – especially those who are most at risk. For many of our member states the combined social, health and economic impacts of this virus joined with the growing threat of climate change mean they are facing a fight for their very existence. But as we are all impacted by the global pandemic, we must all remain united against pandemic and ensure that the legacy left after its devastating course has run should be one of peace, prosperity and development.”

The statement also looked forward to deepening cooperation at the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and associated Commonwealth fora in Rwanda in 2021.
The Commonwealth Journalists Association launch new Press Fellows scholarship for young journalists in memory of CJA co-founder

The Commonwealth Journalists Association (CJA) has announced a new bursary with Wolfson College, Cambridge in memory of CJA co-founder, Derek Ingram. The Fellowship was recently established in honour of the long and distinguished career of Derek Ingram and his outstanding work as a Commonwealth journalist.

Derek Ingram, who died in 2018 aged 92, specialised in writing about Commonwealth and was respected by fellow journalists, particularly for his role in creating the Gemini news agency, which produced written material about Commonwealth countries from 1967 onwards. He was the co-founder of the CJA and served as its President from 1980 to 1990. He was passionate about promoting media freedom in Commonwealth countries and mentoring journalists from member states. His legacy is being used to set up a bursary in his name to help journalists in Commonwealth countries under the Press Fellowships programme at Wolfson College.

Rita Payne Chair, CJA UK President Emeritus Commonwealth Journalists Association said: “We hope the bursary will help talented journalists with limited means to spend time at Wolfson College and benefit from the opportunity to learn about developments in the media, advances in digital technologies and issues of freedom of expression more generally within the UK and to pass on what they have learned to other journalists in their home countries.”

The first award will be made for a journalist to study in 2021. Visit www.wolfson.cam.ac.uk to contact the College.
EDITORIAL: THE COMMONWEALTH AND THE UNITED NATIONS: WORKING TOGETHER TO TACKLE TODAY’S GLOBAL ISSUES

By The Editor of The Parliamentarian, Mr Jeffrey Hyland.

Observer status for the Commonwealth Secretariat at the United Nations was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 11 October 1976. Many regional and international organisations are also observers in the work and annual sessions of the UN General Assembly and maintain permanent offices at the UN Headquarters in New York, USA including the African Union, Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, Economic Community of Western African States, European Union, Inter-Parliamentary Union, International Criminal Court, International Organization of Francophonie and the League of Arab States.

The status of a Permanent Observer is based purely on practice, and there are no provisions for it in the United Nations Charter. The practice dates from 1946, when the UN Secretary-General accepted the designation of the Swiss Government as a Permanent Observer to the United Nations. Observers were subsequently put forward by certain States that later became United Nations Members, including Austria, Finland, Italy, and Japan. Switzerland became a UN Member on 10 September 2002. Permanent Observers have free access to most meetings and relevant documentation.

As a comparison, at the beginning of the 17th session of the UN General Assembly in 1962-63, there were 13 Commonwealth countries at the United Nations, constituting one-eighth of the total membership. During the 17th session, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Uganda became Members of the UN, closely followed by Kenya and Guyana who would join in the following years. Today, there are 193 member states that are members of the United Nations including all 54 countries of the Commonwealth – making up almost a third of the membership.

The Commonwealth has closely aligned to the United Nations in many aspects – for example, in 2015, the Commonwealth strongly supported the UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, as it aligned closely with the final Communiqué of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) that had taken place in Malta the previous month.

The UN resolution stated that youth-led organisations are important partners in global efforts to prevent radicalisation and counter violent extremism and it also supported the youth-led peacebuilding and conflict-prevention programmes that are essential to good governance and the rule of law. The CHOGM Communiqué stated that “Youth people, who comprise 60% of the Commonwealth’s population, have an important role in building stable, secure and prosperous societies, and that Commonwealth programmes can help raise awareness of the risk of radicalisation and prevent young people from embracing violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorism in all its forms and ramifications.”

In December 2019, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland, QC and United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, Her Excellency Amina Mohammed formally committed their organisations to work more closely together with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding. The document outlines how the two organisations will work together on pressing global issues such as peace and security, human rights, post-conflict recovery, human trafficking, climate change, ending violence against women and girls and sports for development and peace.

In a joint statement, the Commonwealth Secretary-General and the Deputy UN Secretary-General said: “The United Nations and Commonwealth have long shared a genuine relationship based on shared goals and values. We are today proud to enhance this friendship and take it to a new level which the delivery of the 2030 Agenda demands. As we turn to a new decade of action, the challenges we face in order to deliver on the world that we want by 2030 demand we address sustainable development, climate change, improving governance and promoting peace.”

In the special edition of The Parliamentarian, the Secretary-General highlighted to the United Nations Human Rights Council that the climate crisis is a global human rights challenge and that the Commonwealth’s 54 countries, 32 of which are small states, are facing a climate change emergency that is costing lives and presenting an “unacceptable human rights challenge” to the world.

Working together in tackling climate change and ocean conservation is also an area where the Commonwealth and the United Nations have had a significant influence. In 2018, the nations of the Commonwealth, covering one third of the world’s oceans, signed the Commonwealth Blue Charter, a landmark agreement to actively co-operate on ocean governance.

At the 43rd session of the UN Human Rights Council in February 2020, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland, QC said: “The stark reality for many states is that their people are losing lives, facing malnourishment, unable to find clean water and their homes are disappearing right before our eyes. From the devastation of hurricane Dorian in The Bahamas last year to the wrath of bushfires in Australia, from severe drought in Namibia to islands inundated with king tides in Kiribati, climate change is a threat to the world and an emergency for small states.”

References:
1 https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/icr/644558/?view=print
3 The Commonwealth and the UN Security Council, Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, 21 September 2015
5 https://www.thecommonwealth.org/media/news/commonwealth-and-united-nations-sign-new-agreement
I am deeply honoured to have been invited to contribute to this special issue of The Parliamentarian on the relationship over the years between the Commonwealth and the United Nations, on this, its seventy-fifth anniversary. I value the invitation all the more, in that I am now the only World War II veteran still in active diplomatic circulation, and as a diplomat I have been concerned with both the Commonwealth and the United Nations for many years.

1 A case of symbiosis

The Commonwealth and UN relationship can be summed up in a single word: Symbiosis; in the sense of “a close and long-term (biological) interaction between two dissimilar organisms.” That proposition needs unpacking.

The Commonwealth defies easy definition. Various imaginative suggestions have been offered: Is it a club? Or a church? Or a family? Or a beehive? Or, indeed, “the mother of all networks”? The answer has to be “all of them, simultaneously”. For one thing is clear: The Commonwealth is organic, an organism, as distinct from an organisation, to a degree which is not characteristic of any other significant international entity.

“Commonwealth reliably does as Commonwealth reliably is” Whatever the difficulties of definition, the distinctive nature of the Commonwealth emerges from what it does, at every level, and in almost every direction, and the way in which it does it. Chief among its virtues, in my experience, are respect for the issues and for the process which is accessible, efficient and transparent. The two go together. There is no better way of inspiring trust in what you are and what you do, than to be known on the one hand to be objective, so intense and so full of promise that it required – indeed it still requires – a great effort of the imagination to grasp their full significance. It can thus be no surprise that the iconic quality of the Preamble was not immediately recognised. On the other hand, the significance of the Charter as a whole was apparent from the outset. As far as the UK is concerned, there has never been a better report by a British delegation to a major conference than that rendered by our powerful team in San Francisco.

Sir Peter Marshall is a former Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General (1983–1988). He joined the UK Diplomatic Service in 1949, rising to become Economic Under-Secretary in the UK’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office. He also held positions at the United Nations in New York and was the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations in Geneva (1979-83). He has also served as the Chair of the Royal Commonwealth Society and the Joint Commonwealth Societies Council. He is the author of ‘Public Diplomacy’ published in 1997.

2 The Commonwealth and the United Nations: 75 years of international symbiosis

role of the Economic and Social Council. Their essence is the commitment (a) without reservation; (b) by all the members of a universal organisation; and (c) for the very first time - to substitute collective sustained pursuit of the common good for previous traditional policies of pursuing their supposed individual national interests at the incidental expense of anyone else, the devil taking the hindmost. In the language of game theory, the signing on 26 June 1945, in San Francisco, of the United Nations Charter converted international relations, for the first time ever, from a zero-sum game into a positive-sum game.

The Preamble: The San Francisco ‘piece de resistance’ Meeting in London on the eve of the San Francisco Conference, the Commonwealth delegations backed an inspirational proposal from the then South African Prime Minister, Jan Christiaan Smuts, a veterans’ champion of the League. He argued that the draft Charter, prepared by the ‘Great Powers’ at Dumbarton Oaks, needed a Preamble, to make its noble and innovative provisions more readily understandable and meaningful for millions of ordinary people deeply conscious of the enormity of what they had endured. The point is made crystal clear by the first words of the Preamble: “We the peoples of the United Nations” - a formula never previously used in a major treaty. “Determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war; which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind”.

With strong support from the Commonwealth delegations, Smuts achieved his objective. As adopted, the Preamble, a mere 200 words in length, is perhaps the greatest text in modern diplomacy. It embodies in the highest degree, the Commonwealth virtues to which I referred earlier. It is the epitome of the positive-sum, responsible approach to the conduct of international relations. It has been the Pole Star of the United Nations and of international life ever since. We ignore it at our peril. I would be at fault if I did not reproduce it in full.

Recognising achievement: The labours of the San Francisco Conference were so multifaceted, so intense and so full of promise that it required – indeed it still requires - a great effort of the imagination to grasp their full significance. It can thus be no surprise that the iconic quality of the Preamble was not immediately recognised. On the other hand, the significance of the Charter as a whole was apparent from the outset. As far as the UK is concerned, there has never been a better report by a British delegation to a major conference than that rendered by our powerful team in San Francisco.

Charter of the United Nations, signed on 26 June 1945

Preamble
We the peoples of the United Nations determined
• to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and
• to reaffirm faith in the fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and
• to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and
• to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

And for these ends
• to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and
• to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and
• to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and
• to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples.

Have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims
• Accordingly, our respective Governments, through representatives assembled in the city of San Francisco, who have exhibited their full powers found to be in good and due form, have agreed to the present Charter of the United Nations and do hereby establish an international organization to be known as the United Nations.
II: The UN and the Commonwealth: partners on an unfinished agenda

The UN Charter was adopted in San Francisco on 26 June 1945. The Commonwealth, represented by the UK delegation, through Lord President of the Council (Sir Anthony Eden) and Foreign Secretary (Ernest Bevin) was present. After the UK delegation had secured the passage of the Charter, Bevin and Eden were invited to speak. Bevin, as head of the UK delegation, spoke first.

He said the Charter was a magnificent document. It was the outcome of discussion, argument, negotiation and compromise. It was not a work of art, but a work of politics. It was an agreement to disagree, to work together in the world community. It was a framework to work within.

Bevin noted that the UN was a new institution, but the principle of collective security was not new. It had been tried before, in the League of Nations. The difference was that the UN was a legally binding instrument.

Bevin continued:

"We are not here to celebrate; we are here to respond, to ensure the future we want and the United Nations we need." The ‘big picture’ could not be clearer. It was the foundation of the United Nations we need.

Jawaharlal Nehru and ‘bringing a touch of healing to a troubled world’

First, the London Declaration of April 1949, by the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, containing the formula by which India retained membership of the Commonwealth, while becoming a republic.

Nehru made the highly relevant additional observation that the Commonwealth could “bring a touch of healing to a troubled world.” Resolving the appalling situation in Southern Africa was a notable case in point.

But that is only the half of it. In explaining the Indian position, Nehru made the highly relevant additional observation that the Commonwealth emerged overnight. Nehru had put an end to its ‘core values and principles of the Commonwealth as declared by this Charter’ in the shape of a list of sixteen target items and priorities. The marked similarity between these and the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 identified in UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015 is something that, shall we say, has to be more of a matter of pure chance.

The Charter is a many-splendoured thing. It naturally uses the first-person plural. Its cover of the issues individually is mastery. Its grasp of their complex inter-relationships is deeply reassuring. It reaffirms the core values and principles of the Commonwealth as declared by this Charter in the shape of a list of sixteen target items and priorities. The marked similarity between these and the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 identified in UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015 is something that, shall we say, has to be more of a matter of pure chance.

Yet, ironically, the Commonwealth Charter makes no mention of the oasis biophysical about the Commonwealth and the Unions. It was perhaps a sign of the times that the references in the Charter to the Unions, where they occur, are functional, rather than general. They relate to specific UN activities and priorities, rather than to its irreplaceable overarching character.

The Commonwealth Charter speaks instead of “influencing international society.” In the brief UK White Paper, under cover of which it was presented to the United Nations, nowhere in the Charter is what is now the ‘overarching’ of the UK Parliament or the Prime Minister, to Westminster, the adjective ‘overarching’ is applied to the Commonwealth Charter itself, describing it as “bringing together the values and commitments of the Commonwealth that are set out in more detail in previous declarations and affirmations.”

Does this blind spot about the UN really matter? Yes, it does, for the ongoing reasons explained in Paragraph 1 of the 2020 Declaration quoted above. If democratic governments, for reasons of current expediency, of lack of familiarity with the background, or of inability to choose the appropriate priorities, evade or ignore their responsibilities of the moment, the bill will be paid later by the peoples.
value to the UN membership as a whole, when handling issues of world-wide concern.

Climate change is clearly one such area. The next COP Summit was to be held in Glasgow, Scotland in November 2021, a year later than originally scheduled.

Secondly, we can act as pilot fish for the UN as a whole. During Sonny Ramphal’s long and highly productive term as Commonwealth Secretary-General (1975-1990), there was a “bakers’ dozen” of Expert Reports mainly on international economic questions. They were of particular relevance because of persistent clashes between the developed countries of the North and the developing countries of the South.

The last of these reports, ‘Climate Change and Sea-level Rise’ (1989-1990), is perhaps the most interesting of them all, in view of the subsequent worldwide developments, with which we are all too familiar. It originated from a discussion at the 1987 CHOGM in Vancouver, Canada, introduced by President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom of the Maldives (1978-2008), where the maximum height of the land does not exceed two metres above sea level. President Hussain Muhammad Ershad of Bangladesh (1983-1990) explained the vast problems of flooding which assailed his country. The rest is history.

Thirdly, while the Commonwealth has never presumed to try and negotiate for the United Nations, circumstances may continue that the Commonwealth is well placed to help the UN to negotiate. When the participants in a dispute are at loggerheads, the most useful thing a well-respected, well-disposed and well-informed outsider can do is assist in the definition, with as much precision as possible, of the key points of difference between the two. You might describe it as “bringing a touch of healing to a troubled situation”.

In which of these established ways is the Commonwealth likely to be of assistance to the United Nations in the future? The answer has to be ‘of all of them, in one way or another’. The agenda outlined in the Commemorative Declaration is so broad, yet so specific and so integrated, that the scope for collective Commonwealth participation is wide indeed.

This makes one of the most important to see what transpires at the next CHOGM. It is difficult to believe that Coronavirus (COVID-19) and climate change will not figure prominently. Nor should we forget the success of the massive Commonwealth Summit of 2018 in London, UK, held improbably in a pre-seasonal heat wave. Its documentary outcome is impressive by any standards, not least as regards cyber-security and ocean management.

Inalienable human rights

Important as so all of these matters, individually and collectively, instinct suggests that the Commonwealth may in fact find itself dwelling on something which may initially appear somewhat esoteric, yet which is of fundamental importance to our future together: namely, ‘not only how we treat one another, but how we think about one another’.

The US Declaration of Independence picks out, from among the ‘inalienable’ rights with which we are endowed by our Creator, three items: life, liberty and – supremely enigmatically – ‘the pursuit of happiness’, which we may take inter alia to mean ‘an existence unblighted by the behavour, the attitudes or the mindsets of others’.

The first of the specific undertakings set out in the Commemorative Declaration is ‘we will leave no one behind’, a concept deriving from the Sustainable Development Goals. The wording of the undertaking as it is now is perceptible. Its implications are absorbing. It must surely extend to all those who are in any way disadvantaged, or marginalised, and also to those who experience exclusion or alienation for whatever reason, and in whatever form. We can think of this as a Fifth Freedom, to add to the ‘four freedoms’ that were enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December 1948, by the United Nations General Assembly, Article 1 of which provided: ‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.’

There is no suggestion that this approach somehow replaces direct action to combat present ills, especially racism. Rather it complements it.

IV. Envoi

When the UN Charter was signed in 1945, no-one was in any doubt that the success of the venture would be greatly dependent on public opinion in the member states, as expressed through their respective legislative bodies. However different conditions may be seventy-five years later, this proposition is no less true. It may indeed be truer, in as far as internal affairs have become so much more entangled with foreign affairs, and events abroad impinge so much more on life at home.

As regards the role of the Commonwealth in the United Nations, bring this offering to a close by recalling the terms of the very first recorded statement by the Commonwealth Prime Ministers collectively — in May 1944, on the eve of D-Day during the Second World War. They — Winston Churchill, Mackenzie King, Curtin, Fraser and Smuts — noted that this was the first time they had been able to meet during the war. They record that they were joined in their discussions by the Indian representatives at the War Cabinet and the Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia.

In their concluding paragraph, they state that ‘they were met in that unity which finds its strength not in any formal bond but in the hidden springs from which human action flows’. It is inconceivable that anyone but Churchill could have drafted that sentence. The same can be said of the final prophetic word: ‘we believe that when victory is won and peace returns, this same free association, this same unity of purpose will make us able to do further service to mankind.’

A year later the Commonwealth produced the iconic Preamble to the UN Charter. The possibility of further service cannot be ruled out.

References:
2 The Dumbarton Oaks Conference or, more formally, the Washington Conversations on International Peace and Security Organization was an international conference at which the United Nations was formulated and negotiated among international leaders. The conference was held at Dumbarton Oaks, in Washington, D.C. USA, from 21 August 1944 to 7 October 1944.
4 The US Declaration of Independence, 4 July 1776. The draft was written by Thomas Jefferson.
5 The Dumbarton Oaks Declaration on World Order – see https://uncommonwealth.org/nassau-declaration-world-order.
6 The Five Freedoms were goals articulated by United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt on 6 January 1941 that became known as the Four Freedoms speech (technically the 1941 State of the Union address). He proposed four fundamental freedoms that people ‘everywhere in the world’ ought to enjoy: freedom of speech; freedom of worship; freedom from want; freedom from fear.

At the request of the author, this article is published in memoriam of Ms Patty Robertson, former Director of Information at The Commonwealth Secretariat and Official Secretary-General for the Commonwealth (1983-1994) who passed away recently. She was also Chair of the Commonwealth Association and The Ramphele Institute.
THE UNITED NATIONS AND ITS IMPACT IN COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES: A VIEW FROM THE SPEAKER OF INDIA’S LOK SABHA

Established in 1945 to usher in a new World Order in a world faced with damnation and lunation after two great wars, the United Nations is completing 75 years of glorious service as a multilateral platform for the common利益 of nations later this year.

Over these seven and a half decades, through its untiring initiatives and endeavours, it has reaffirmed the faith of the international community in peaceful coexistence, international cooperation, justice and human rights including the dignity of the individual.

The United Nations Organization stands testimony to the shared values and interests of countries in a globalized world order and their ability to cooperate for the mutual benefit of all. The UN Charter provides and employs the international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples. It seeks to promote and encourage respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction of race, sex, language, or religion. It has sought to promote social progress and a better standard of living for people across the world. The UN provided the hope of self-determination to millions of subjugated people across the globe particularly those suffering from the colonial yoke.

India, being one of the 26 original signatories to the United Nations Declaration was also among the 51 original founding member states who signed the UN Charter in San Francisco, USA on 26 June 1945, based on which the UN came into being on 24 October 1945.

The Commonwealth in its present avatars predates the UN. However, the formal Commonwealth of Independent Countries also emerged around the same time as the UN in 1949. The 1949 London Declaration made it clear that republics and other countries could be part of the Commonwealth. The decision to retain the Commonwealth membership was one of independent India’s first major foreign policy decisions. It was not only a definining moment in the evolution of the Commonwealth but also opened the door for a larger role for India in international politics. Presently, more than half of Commonwealth countries have a republican form of government.

There is a lot of commonality between the Commonwealth Charter and the objectives set out in the UN Charter. The UN and the modern Commonwealth are both more than 70 years old and are committed to promoting international peace and security, human rights and sustainable development. Both seek to protect and preserve Mother Earth.

Time and again, the Commonwealth has expressed its solidarity with the UN and a commitment to its Charter. The 1951 Declaration by the Commonwealth Prime Ministers succinctly sums up this convergence: “Our support of the United Nations needs no re-affirmation. The Commonwealth and the United Nations are not inconsistent bodies. On the contrary, the existence of the Commonwealth, linked together by the ties of friendship, common purpose and common endeavour, is a source of power behind the Charter.”

The Declaration of Commonwealth Principles Singapore, 1971 states: “We believe that international co-operation is essential to remove the causes of war, promote tolerance, combat injustice, and secure development among the peoples of the world, we are convinced that the Commonwealth is one of the most fruitful associations for these purposes.”

Concerned at the diminishing capacity of international institutions to play an effective role in world affairs, the Commonwealth Heads of Government, in their historic 1983 Goa Declaration, pledged renewed support for the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter. The Commonwealth is strongly anchored on the principles contained in the 1991 Harare Declaration.

Today, the Commonwealth has become an ideal platform for its members to communicate, share ideas, experiences and best practices and co-ordinate activities despite differences in cultures, traditions and belief. It is interesting that Commonwealth countries until 2011 were held together by their strength of shared traditions and experiences, institutions and the desire for greater economic cooperation. For it was only in 2011 at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Perth, Australia that the Commonwealth Charter was proposed and was adopted on 19 December 2012.

To our immense satisfaction, it is gradually acquiring a global character. The latest two entrants, Rwanda and Mozambique, have never been a part of the British Empire. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) deserves much credit for bringing together MPs of Commonwealth countries on a single platform to exchange views on a variety of contemporary issues.

There is a huge convergence of interest between the Commonwealth and the UN on issues like strengthening good governance and the rule of law, protecting and promoting democratic principles and human rights and strengthening democratic institutions. Both emphasise youth empowerment, gender equality, inclusive and sustainable economic growth for realising the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Both are committed to free trade in a transparent, inclusive, fair, and open rules based multilateral trading system. Both acknowledge the importance of disaster preparedness in reducing the impact of natural disasters.

The Commonwealth support to the UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1915 of 31 October 2000 that recognised, amongst other things, women’s right to participate in peace processes is too well known. Commonwealth countries understand their commitment under the Paris Agreement to mitigate the impact of global warming and climate change and are vigorously striving to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels as prescribed in the Paris Agreement.

There is a renewed commitment in the Commonwealth to shift to clean forms of energy and partner with relevant organisations, including the International Solar Alliance to promote sustainable economic growth.

The Commonwealth is against violent extremism in all its forms and supports the UN Secretary-General’s January 2016 Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism by addressing the underlying conditions that drive individuals to radicalize and join violent extremist groups.

The Commonwealth has also endorsed the UNSC Resolution 2250 of 9 December 2015 on Youth, Peace and Security which focuses on promoting youth participation, prevention, protection, partnership and engagement and reintegration as five pillars for action related to young people’s contribution to peace processes and conflict resolution.

India has time and again reiterated its commitment to the UN Charter and has been playing an important role in the UN system. It has also contributed to the Commonwealth with the same commitment. The Indian Parliament, on the occasion of the Fifty-Fifth Anniversary of the United Nations, had passed a Resolution on 22 December 1994 reaffirming India’s commitment to the UN and determination to build upon its achievements and utilise its potential to advance our shared aspirations of peace, security and prosperity. The Resolution also reiterated India’s belief that the UN is uniquely placed to promote a more just, equitable, and prosperous and secure world order and should be strengthened to reflect the current political and economic realities.

The Indian Parliament is also a regular and active participant in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association at the international and regional levels.

India has been at the forefront of many UN resolutions. Over seven decades, India has strongly supported the advancement of human rights at the UN. In the initial years, India forcefully raised issues like decolonization, apartheid, human rights, non-alignment, nuclear disarmament, new international economic order, North-South relations, South-South cooperation, democracy, etc. and brought in a new dimension to the working of the United Nations that was more weighed with security related matters. India was one of the prominent members of the UN who raised the plight of the colonized countries.

Ultimately in 1960, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on decolonization, the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. The Resolution declared that “subjecting people to alien subjugation constitutes denial of human rights and is an impediment to attaining world peace.”

India also played an important role in ending apartheid in South Africa. On 2 December 1995, the UN General Assembly declared that “a policy of ‘racial segregation’ (apartheid) is necessarily based on doctrines of racial discrimination.”

India strongly advocated for the abolition of apartheid at the UN and at all international forums, including the Commonwealth, ultimately leading to its end and the emergence of South Africa as a democratic country. India was also able to get a resolution on the

Hon. Shri Om Birla was unanimously elected as the Speaker of the 17th Lok Sabha in the Parliament of India on 19 June 2019. He has been a Member of Parliament for Kota-Bundi parliamentary constituency since 2014. He was previously a Member of the Rajasthan Vidhan Sabha (Provincial Assembly) from 2003 to 2014. He has held positions with the youth wing of his party, Bhartiya Janta Yuva Morcha, as National Vice President, State President and District President. He completed his Master of Commerce at Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati University.
treatment of Indians in the Union of South Africa, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 8 December 1946.13

India has been relentlessly calling for elimination of nuclear weapons. India has been actively participating in the economic, social and humanitarian activities of the United Nations.

India has participated in UN peacekeeping missions since its inception and has contributed more peacekeepers to UN missions than any other country. India has provided more than 200,000 military and police officers to UN peacekeeping over the last 70 years.14 It has the distinction of contributing the world’s first female peacekeeping force that served towards bringing peace in Liberia in 2007.

In view of the pandemic of COVID-19 and the demand from several countries for the drug hydroxychloroquine (HCQ), India has gone out of its way to meet the global demand at short notice, on pure humanitarian grounds and as a way of showing solidarity in the hoary tradition of ‘सत्यस्वादन कुटुंबकम’ (Vasudhaiva kutumbakam) or ‘the World is a Family’.

Terrorism has become an important concern for all peace-loving countries and India is campaigning for the adoption of a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism to combat cross-border terrorism. India has been striving for the reform of the United Nations Security Council and the creation of a more representative and democratic body to make it more effective in dealing with peace and security related issues.

The 2007 UN Declaration celebrating 2 October, Mahatma Gandhi’s birthday, as the International Day of Non-Violence is a recognition of the relevance of Mahatma Gandhi’s ideal of non-violence.15

The proclamation of 21 June as the International Day of Yoga by the UN General Assembly on 11 December 2014 is a recognition of yoga as a holistic approach to health and well being of all.16

The election of India on 17 June 2020 with an overwhelming confidence in its capability to strengthen the Council. Ever since the United Nations was established in 1945, it has been engaged in addressing the multifarious and complex challenges that have emerged from time to time. As it brings together the leaders of the world on a single platform to share their thoughts, it has been able to provide resolutions based on consensus views. Though the UN remains the principal forum for multilateralism, the Commonwealth is eminently placed in addressing many complex issues through the unique style of functioning, which is again marked by consensus building, informality and goodwill. Both the UN and Commonwealth have immensely contributed to promoting world peace and development. The future of both organizations is intertwined in a myriad of ways and on their continued success, rest the future of a peaceful and sustainable world.

The following ancient Sanskrit Sloka very profoundly lays down the future roadmap of these two global entities:

शप्तसप्तादि: परिमलतम्यान प्राप्तम भैरवी नाती महाराम।
श्रद्धालुः सर्वायुः विश्व विश्वसन आरक्षौ नित्य।

English Translation: May the well-being of all people be protected by the powerful and mighty leaders. Be with law and justice. May the success be with all divinity and scholars. May contentment prevail world over.

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4 https://thecommonwealth.org/value-for-money
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6 https://thecommonwealth.org/harare-declaration
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8 https://urcosa.int/press-and-media/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement
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11 UN General Assembly resolution 175 (IV) on 9 December 1962 - https://www.ychipr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/Independence.aspx
14 https://peacekeeping.un.org/inndia
15 https://www.un.org/en/events/nonviolenceday

Left: India has participated in UN peacekeeping missions since its inception and is one of the largest contributors of peacekeepers. India can resort to imposing sanctions or even authorise the use of force to maintain or restore international peace and security.

The UN Security Council has five permanent members, who have the right to veto resolutions: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. Ten non-permanent members are elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms, with five elected each year. Joining India and Kenya at the UN Security Council in January 2021 are Ireland, Mexico and Norway. They will replace Belgium, Dominican Republic, Germany, Indonesia and South Africa. Estonia, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia and Vietnam will remain on the UN Security Council until the end of 2021.

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1 External Affairs Minister’s remarks during launch of India’s Priorities for its candidature for the UN Security Council 2021-22 - June 05, 2020: https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/32736/External_Affairs_Ministers_remarks_during_launch_of_Indias_Priorities_for_its_candidature_for_the_UN_Security_Council_202122
2 Kenya Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Statement on the United National General Assembly, with 192 countries in a series of voting in the UN General Assembly, with 192 ambassadors casting their ballots during pre-determined time slots, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ahead of the election, the India External Affairs Minister, Dr Subrahmaniyam Jaishankar said: “The COVID-19 pandemic and its grave economic repercussions will test the world like never before. In this extraordinary situation, India can play a positive global role. We have always been a voice of reason and a votary of international law. We advocate dialogue, consultation and fairness in our approach to global issues. And we emphasize global development, addressing climate change and eradicating of poverty as central to planet’s future.”

Ambassador Raychelle Omamo, Cabinet Secretary said in a statement on behalf of the Government of Kenya: “Kenya shall partner with members of the Security Council, as one of the three African members of the United Nations Security Council … I reaffirm Kenya’s firm commitment to a rules-based ethos, buttressed by robust multilateralism, secured by the United Nations Charter and International Law. Kenya anticipates continued support to ensure global peace and security for sustainable development and shared prosperity.”

Fifteen countries sit on the UN Security Council and each member has one vote. Under the Charter of the United Nations, all Member States are obligated to comply with Council decisions. The Security Council takes the lead in determining the existence of a threat to the peace or act of aggression. It calls upon the parties to a dispute to settle it by peaceful means and recommends methods of adjustment or terms of settlement. In some cases, the Security Council can resort to imposing sanctions or even authorise the use of force to maintain or restore international peace and security.

Commonwealth News: Two Commonwealth Countries to Join the UN Security Council from 2021

In June 2020, it was announced that two Commonwealth countries – India and Kenya – have been elected as non-permanent members of the UN Security Council, the United Nations organ that maintains international peace and security. UN Member States chose the countries in a series of voting in the UN General Assembly, with 192 ambassadors casting their ballots during pre-determined time slots, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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At a deeper level, the problem today is that globalization, the flip side of multilateralism, has yet to deliver fully on its promise of shared prosperity and peace. As inequalities grow deeper, as new security threats emerge, and as climate change and other environmental problems get out of control, people grow disillusioned with their governments and, by extension, with multilateral organisations such as the UN. The situation is being compounded by the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

There is no question in my mind that the world needs the UN today more than ever. We just need a way to make the UN a more effective steward of the people’s welfare so as to realise the original intent of the Charter: “to save people from the scourge of war”, “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights” and “to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.” For the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), an organisation devoted to democracy-building, a big part of the solution must entail engaging Parliaments and Parliamentarians more closely in UN decision-making processes.

It should be clear that the IPU does not aim to have Parliaments substitute for governments in the conduct of international affairs. However, the agreements that are negotiated through the UN deliberative machinery need wider buy-in than just that of the governments of this world. They need to include the views of Parliaments as the bodies that best represent all people from all sides of the political spectrum, and that are constitutionally endowed with oversight authority to ensure that those international agreements are implemented domestically through appropriate laws and budgets.

For the last twenty years since the turn of the century and the start of a new millennium, the IPU has worked steadily to bring the parliaments closer to the UN via their parliamentary representatives. This has required creating whole new processes and tools to enable Parliaments and their Members to participate more effectively in UN processes. While this vision of a parliamentary dimension to the work of the UN – as we call it – is not fully realised yet, it remains key to making the UN more open and accountable to the people.

Practically speaking, the IPU’s vision has its foundation at the national level, where Parliaments actually operate and engage with their respective governments. It is about enabling national Parliaments to provide input to their governments’ policy positions in UN forums and to oversee their governments’ response to UN agreements (i.e. treaties and conventions, resolutions and political declarations).

The sooner a Parliament is aware of a UN negotiation or reform process, the more it can engage with the government in developing a national position that includes the views of all the people represented by the Parliament. It is starting how, even today, so many Parliaments are unaware of what their governments are saying at the UN. To bridge this gap and enable Parliaments to exercise their oversight role more effectively, the IPU regularly invites UN ambassadors and officials to brief Parliamentarians at our biannual assemblies, organises parliamentary hearings and events at the UN to track important processes, and facilitates direct interaction between national Parliaments and UN country offices. In addition, we have set up a Committee on UN Affairs to review UN reforms and the UN response to major issues of the day.

A special oversight mechanism that we have devised relates to the yearly reports that governments submit to the UN on three key issues: human rights (through the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council), gender equality (through national reports submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women), and the Sustainable Development Goals (through Voluntary National Reviews of the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development). In each of these cases, we alert the Parliaments of the states submitting reports to the UN to the process ahead so they can provide input before the reports are finalised.

Evidently, facilitating more Parliament-to-government interaction on UN affairs only works to the extent that Parliaments themselves are representative of the people at large and are duly capacitated to perform their oversight function. This is why, at the same time as we work to bring Parliaments to the UN, we also work to strengthen Parliaments at home. To that effect, the IPU works either alone or in partnership with others for gender equality in Parliament (women
The Parliamentarian | 2020: Issue Three | 100 years of publishing 1920-2020

 occupy only 25% of all parliamentary seats globally) and for fairer representation of youth and other under-represented groups. Through dialogue and peer pressure, we promote democratic practices such as being more open to civil society input and respecting the rights of Members of the opposition.

On the implementation side of the equation, i.e. making UN agreements actionable within countries, the IPU is also very active, with a panoply of awareness-raising events and publications to help Parliamentarians figure out the legislation they need to enact. Many of our workshops and publications are prepared in cooperation with UN agencies and programmes. The most consequential and comprehensive agenda of our time, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, is the only way forward. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) held its Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, just a few days before the Millennium Summit of Heads of State and Government.

The virtual conference also included a special online event on countering terrorism and violent extremism on the eve of the opening session heard from Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, President of the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly. The speakers included the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Mr. Gabriela Cuevas Barron, and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ms. António Guterres.

This said, there is no question that in just twenty years Parliaments and Parliamentarians have gained greater visibility at the UN. I am convinced that, with a little more perseverance and commitment on the political front, and more resources to sustain needed reforms, we can go deeper and revamp our multilateral system. Multilateralism is damaged but far from dead.

On this landmark anniversary, I wish the UN good health for many more years to come.

The Parliamentarian | 2020: Issue Three | 100 years of publishing 1920-2020

UN reforms that would recognise the need to engage more closely with Parliaments as a way of strengthening multilateralism through the UN. Clearly, there is a need to rethink the antiquated vision of international relations and global governance that sees governments, represented by their executives, as exclusively in charge.

The main concession to us in the declaration comes under the rubric of ‘partnership’ where Parliamentarians – as opposed to the institution of Parliament – were added to a long list of actors, such as civil society, the private sector and academia, that can help carry forward UN objectives. While this addition is welcome, it does not quite capture the parliamentary perspective that the IPU has advocated over the years. Partnership with Parliaments at the UN is a concept that has mainly been applied to the implementation of UN agreements, where Parliaments are indeed critical, but where their intervention is only as good and effective as the agreements themselves. When it comes to making room for Parliaments in the actual decision-making processes of the UN, partnership cannot go very deep in the absence of real institutional reforms.

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2020 was to be a pivotal year for multilateralism. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the 20th anniversary of the groundbreaking UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. As such, it was to be a year of great mobilization for the rights, voice and leadership of women and girls.

2020 was also supposed to serve as an opportunity for the world to recommit to the Paris Agreement’s 2-degree limit on global temperature increase, through new and more ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

The Human Rights Treaty Body Review was foreseen as a chance to re-evaluate the system that monitors countries’ compliance with international human rights obligations. Similarly, the review of the UN’s Peacebuilding Architecture promised an informed assessment of how well the international community - through the UN - is prepared to sustain international peace.

Finally, as the commencement of the decade of action on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 2020 was to be a year of recommitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its aim to eliminate global poverty and inequality while respecting the planet’s natural limits.

As we approach the final quarter of 2020, however, the overwhelming focus of Member States has, understandably, been the pandemic response to COVID-19. Yet it is timely to recall that the pandemic response to COVID-19 has been uneven. It has exacerbated this disconnect, especially when characterised by outright official denial, reprehensible leadership, poorly-executed lockdowns, prematurely lifted and then re-imposed, and failures to coordinate in the delivery of health messages and services. In such cases, the result has been a failure to either contain the virus or preserve people’s economic security. A feature of these poor responses has frequently been a failure to either contain the virus or preserve people’s economic security. A feature of these poor responses has frequently been a weak, inadequately-capacitated, or marginalised Legislature that has been unable to translate popular will into action by governments. In many countries, the governance response to COVID-19 has been uneven. It has exacerbated this disconnect, especially when characterised by outright official denial, reprehensible leadership, poorly-executed lockdowns, prematurely lifted and then re-imposed, and failures to coordinate in the delivery of health messages and services. In such cases, the result has been a failure to either contain the virus or preserve people’s economic security. A feature of these poor responses has frequently been a weak, inadequately-capacitated, or marginalised Legislature that has been unable to translate popular will into action by governments. In some cases, Parliaments and Parliamentarians have even been shuttered indefinitely, and elections postponed.

There are, however, examples of good governance responses, in countries where to date the pandemic response, and its economic and social consequences, have been well-managed. These have tended to involve effective service delivery, transparency and good communication on the part of governments, combined with high levels of trust and social cohesion on the part of populations.

In many of these cases, Parliaments and Parliamentarians have played a significant leadership role.

First, they have maintained effective oversight of the immediate pandemic response, ensuring that it is evidence-based, fit-for-purpose, and appropriately-targeted. Where emergency powers have been taken or invoked, they have ensured that these are exercised proportionately, in a time-limited fashion, and with respect for underlying human rights frameworks.

Secondly, they have ensured that an adequate, effectively-distributed, and properly-controlled short-to-medium term recovery budget and plan are in place. Given the very significant expenditures usually involved, effective oversight of new borrowing commitments has been required, as have the creation or strengthening of probity safeguards over public appointment and financing processes.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Parliaments and Parliamentarians have been able to insist on a meaningful dialogue - between the people they represent and the governments they oversee - on a vision for how to ‘build back better’, or in other parlance, ‘build forward better’ on a long-term basis after the immediate challenge presented by COVID-19 has been met.

At their best, these dialogues have sought to ensure that policy choices are not limited by corporate interests; reflect the need for greater resilience, inclusion, and sustainability; and are underpinned by the urgent need to recommit to action over the coming decade, to achieve the vision of the 2030 Declaration as set out in the SDGs. Some have looked to learn and maintain traction on the new sustainable sectors and practices which have emerged or re-asserted themselves such as telecommuting, locally-sourced production and consumption or ‘doughnut economics’.

They have also involved parliamentary diplomacy as part of efforts to ensure a shared approach to solutions, including the availability of development finance on just terms, and the need for an equitable approach to the distribution of personal protective equipment – and vaccines when they become available.

These initiatives - to improve the quality of response and recovery, and to empower an inclusive vision for building back better, have cut across the traditional legislative, oversight and representational mandates. They have frequently required Parliaments and Parliamentarians to find innovative ways of working and interacting. Systematising civic engagement, interfacing more effectively with local government, and ensuring that the voices of those most at risk of being left behind are heard - have been common elements, in many cases facilitated through the deployment of new technologies. Initially taken up as emergency procedural responses, they are being adopted as regular ongoing features of the ways in which Parliaments work, with the potential to enhance engagement and help restore faith in representative governance.

Just as the governance response to COVID-19 at Member State level has varied, so has the multilateral one.

'THE FUTURE WE WANT, THE UN WE NEED: REAFFIRMING OUR COLLECTIVE COMMITMENT TO MULTILATERALISM'

Charles Chauvel is Global Lead, Inclusive Processes at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). He is also a former Parliamentarian in the New Zealand Parliament.

Agata Walczak is a Parliamentary Project Manager at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
There are some notable success stories. From the outset of the crisis UNDP, through its 80 country-level parliamentary support programmes, has supported Parliaments to share knowledge, innovate, and enhance voice and accountability. As around half of these programmes are in Commonwealth nations, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has been our key partner in support of development and good governance.

As part of wider multilateral efforts, UNDP has supported countries in the development of more than 80 socio-economic assessments and response plans. We are raising global attention and debate on the need for unprecedented development measures for these unprecedented times. This includes advocacy for the immediate introduction of a Temporary Basic Income for the world’s poorest people, that could slow the current surge in COVID-19 cases by enabling nearly three billion people to stay home, and stay safe.

And we are mobilising new sources of development finance. The UNDP Rapid Response Financing Facility making some $100m of flexible financing available through UNDP Country Offices, building on $30m in reprogrammed funds since March and more than $390m in reprogrammed, new, and additional funding.

Still more widely, the multilateral system has been striving to rise to the challenge. The recent adoption by the UN Security Council of resolution 2532 demanding “a general and immediate cessation of hostilities in all situations” is a case in point. So is the ongoing mobilisation by the World Food Programme of US$ 4.5bn to provide life-saving services targeting the world’s most vulnerable populations from starvation. The adoption by the UN General Assembly of resolution 74/274 on international cooperation to ensure global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment to face COVID-19 is also important, as is the collaborative development and support plans. We are raising global attention and debate on the need for such a re-invigoration.

Ultimately, the pandemic cannot be defeated, except through collective action. Nor can the unprecedented reversal in human development and security, and enhancing such action. So are the efforts of Parliaments and Parliamentarians to reinvigorate partnerships for voice, accountability, inclusion, and resilience.

The crisis of 2020 reminds us that the UN we need is crucial to the future we want. It demands that we recommit to gender equality and human rights, to peace, to climate justice; and to achieving the SDGs by 2030. And it demonstrates the catastrophic consequences of failing to do so.


To raise to this challenge, it is without a doubt vital to address how the multilateral system can function more effectively, both in form and in substance. At UNDP, we recognise that the crises of today require a different kind of development that makes the most of the knowledge, ingenuity and innovation of those we serve, work and partner with, and which facilitates learning on how to do things better. To remain fit for purpose, the UN system, with UNDP being no exception, will have to continue transforming the way it works. But addressing the weak points of the multilateral system will also require a reflection and a decisive commitment on the part of Member States.

2020 may have failed - thanks to circumstance - to fulfill its original promise to serve as a year for the re-invigoration of multilateralism. But it has also served to remind us that there is simply no alternative to the need for such a re-invigoration.

A UK Parliamentarian reflects on the United Nations at 75 and looks at the institution from the perspective of an academic, Parliamentarian and Chair of a UN Association.

I am privileged to be able to view the 75th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations with the perspective of three different professional hats.

As an academic who has taught politics at Oxford University since 1995, I have always thought of the UN as a little miracle of the post-WW2 world. The daily price it pays of compromise and impasse, diplomatic roadblocks and states wily ignoring its rules, is more than repaid by the quiet transformations of our world that the UN is helping to bring about. Because every day the UN is responsible for feeding, clothing and vaccinating those most in need, keeping the peace and keeping refugees alive, trying to stop states failing and helping new states survive and thrive. When disaster strikes the UN is first in and last out. The truth is that it didn’t exist, it could never be created now. And for all its limitations, our world is so much better for the vision and battles that built it 75 years ago.

My second hat is that of Chair of the UK’s United Nations Association (UNA-UK). The UNA network across the world was formed to serve as a bridge between the public and the United Nations. The early Associations captured the spirit of post-war enthusiasm and were also engaged in reconstruction work. A second wave of UNAs formed in the wake of decolonisation and new nation-building, from the late 1950s to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. There are now just over 100 UNAs, including an active European network. Their core mission is to provide information to the public about what the UN does – through work with schools and universities, to public information and outreach, campaigns, and briefings for Parliamentarians and decision-makers. Some, like UNAs in China and Norway, are closely associated with their governments and receive most of their funding from foreign or development ministries. Some, like UNA-UK and UNA-USA, have a full-time paid staff and draw their funding instead from foundations, members and public donors.

They also differ greatly in their approach. UNA-UK combines information and education with advocacy and campaigning. We focus not only on the UN, but on the UK’s relationship with it, by hosting public events, conducting research, producing various publications and working in partnership with a range of individuals and organisations. There are many UNAs that focus mainly on education and youth work, including Model UNs. While others such as Ghana’s and Pakistan’s UNAs run practical projects – working with refugees, young people, promoting tree-planting and drug awareness, for example.

UNA-UK shares its 75th year with the United Nations, and like the UN, it is a second take. The Association’s roots lie in the League of Nations Union (LNU), formed in 1918 to promote international justice and collective security through the establishment of the League of Nations. It became the largest and most influential peace organisation in the UK, with nearly half a million members, playing an important role in British politics with the involvement of prominent Liberal and Conservative politicians. The LNU left that Britain’s growing isolationism had to be countered by a massive demonstration of support for a UK foreign policy in which the League played a central role.

The collapse of the League demanded a new approach after World War Two. On 7 June 1945, three weeks before the United Nations Charter was opened for signature, UNA-UK held its first meeting. On 10 October, a fortnight before the UN Charter entered into force, the Association was inaugurated in a packed Royal Albert
Hail in London. The then UK Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, Anthony Eden, MP and Morgen Lloyd-George, MP addressed the crowd.

The Association absorbed much of the LNU’s work, resources and staff. In the late 1940s, it focused on enshrining the values of the UN Charter in the hearts and minds of Britons and on calling for strong UK support for its work – including a generous approach to resettling refugees.

UNA-UK’s work has, like that of the UN’s, shifted focus across the decades in response to the global challenges faced in the post-war world. In the 1950s, we started collections to support the UN’s work, effectively doubling the UK’s contribution to UNICEF in 1953. Volunteers were sent to rebuild houses in Austria and Germany. A decade later, the volunteer programme had grown, with 30 overseas camps and an official placement scheme. By this time, disarmament and human rights had become major concerns for the Association, as well as early concerns about global environmental issues.

In the 1970s, UNA-UK campaigned tirelessly for overseas development aid. Our call for the UK to meet the 0.7% target was only met in 2013. We also organised a series of events ahead of the first UN World Conference on Women. The 1980s saw UNA-UK lead the ‘Let’s Freeze this Winter’ campaign, which lobbied hard against increased deployment of missiles by NATO and the USSR. After the UK withdrew from the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Association set up an informal all-party group of MPs to work for its re-entry, eventually achieved in 1997.

The national commission for UNESCO was also housed within UNA-UK. Organization (UNESCO), the Association set up an informal all-party group of MPs to work for its re-entry, eventually achieved in 1997.

In the past 30 years, UNA-UK has moved into education work, with model UN events and teaching resources originally linked to the UN’s 50th anniversary a quarter of a century ago. But we have also been prominent in campaigns for peace and security. We campaigned against the Iraq war and for greater arms control, and I am proud that UNA-UK played a pivotal role in reversing the UK’s position on cluster munitions, paving the way for a global treaty.

More recently, we have turned our campaigning zeal on the UN itself. In the 2010s, we prioritised work to make the UN more effective. Three campaigns exemplify this approach: first, our successful push to keep teaching about the United Nations and collective action through the UN to tackle new challenges – from climate change to migration, from meeting the challenge of new pandemics to cyber-terrorism? The jury is still out on how the UK will respond. UNA-UK will continue to work for more engagement rather than more retreat.

My third hat is that of a Parliamentarian since 2011, when I was made a Labour peer and Member of the UK House of Lords. The relationship between the UN and national Parliaments is a chequered and indirect one. As a coalition of member states, the UN does suffer from a large degree of government-centricity. Opportunities for engagement – be it from Parliamentarians, civil society organisations or individual citizens – has always been limited. As Sir Brian Urquhart and Erskine Childers commented in their seminal 1994 study Renewing the UN system: “The peoples of the United Nations introduce the Charter and then completely disappear from that document.”

Urquhart and Childers recommended the establishment of a UN Parliamentary Assembly, a parallel body of global Parliamentarians, to engage with the UN system. A campaign developed around this issue, and nearly 30 years later it is still a vibrant one (you can find it here: https://en.unpacampaign.org/). In the meantime, engagement from Parliamentarians within the UN system remains ad hoc. Parliamentarians are not one of the nine ‘major groups’ of stakeholders that the UN primarily engages with (interestingly local authorities are included) and so instead the Inter-Parliamentary Union has set up its own mechanisms, notably by working with the President of the General Assembly and relevant UN departments to organise an annual parliamentary hearing.

Here in the UK, the UK Parliament has done a number of things to engage with the UN - particularly in the House of Lords. UNA-UK convenes the UN All Party Parliamentary Group, which organises briefings and events connecting UN officials with UK parliamentarians. We recently held events with the UN’s Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) head, Mark Lowcock, and with the UN75 Office. The Lords International Relations Committee held an inquiry in 2016 on priorities for the incoming Secretary-General of the United Nations. While the UK House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee has interviewed a number of current and former UN officials as part of recent inquiries, including David Beasley of the World Food Programme, and former High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Al Hussein. The same Committee is currently undertaking an inquiry regarding the UK’s involvement with multilateral organisations.

The quest to connect national Parliaments more systematically to UN activities continues. But the truth is there is little enthusiasm or support for that agenda among member states’ governments. Instead, UNA-UK decided to use the UN’s upcoming 75th anniversary to prioritise the promotion of civil society engagement with the UN, through developing a dedicated focal point for civil society at the UN in New York. The result is the Together First initiative, which UNA-UK is leading, in the hope of building a deeper relationship between the UN and active campaigners outside of national foreign ministries. The hope is that this focal point may in the future offer opportunities for better and broader engagement with non-state actors, including Parliamentarians. In an era of populism and scepticism inside governments about the effectiveness of multilateral cooperation, the strength of relationships between the UN and non-state actors will be crucial to determining whether the UN can rise to the challenges it will face in the coming decades.

For more information about the work of the UN Association UK (UNA-UK) please visit www.una.org.uk
The international community’s approach to youth engagement today is paying the way for sustainable development, peace, the Agenda 2030 and for leaving no one behind. Young people, as the dominant majority population in most developing countries today, are pioneers in political action, innovation, entrepreneurship and peacebuilding. Yet, young people face a plethora of social, economic and political barriers that undermine their ability as changemakers.

To utilize young people’s change-making capacity to the fullest, their participation needs to be facilitated at all levels including in civic and political life. This is not just key to the realization of the Agenda 2030 but also one of its core requirements. Today, young people under 30 make up more than half of the global population - the largest generation of youth the world has ever known. In the Commonwealth, 60% of its 2.4 billion population are aged under 30.

However, only around 2% of elected legislators worldwide are under the age of 30 and 65% of the chambers of Parliament continue to impose a ‘waiting time’ between the age to vote and the age of eligibility to run for political office imposing age restrictions on entering democratic institutions.

Despite the many barriers that exclude young people from accessing and meaningfully participating in formal political spaces, young people around the world are not waiting to be heard, but insist on claiming their space, pushing for change and serving their communities. The recent outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the exemplary resilience, courage and ingenuity that young people have demonstrated in the face of adversity and uncertainty that affect their futures more than anything.

Further, not only have they risen to the occasion to take on the ‘new normal’ post-COVID-19, but they have actively taken a leadership role in pioneering their communities out of the crisis by working at the frontlines as healthcare workers, innovating creative solutions, combating misinformation online, distributing rations, volunteering to support elderly and raising awareness online, and mobilising their peers.

Young people play an indispensable role in reimagining their communities and are constantly leading action for a better and more sustainable world. And I strongly believe, that when someone is old enough to vote, they should be old enough to run for office. This is why my Office, together with partners such as the Youth Initiative for Advocacy Growth & Advancement of Nigeria (YIAGA) founded the ‘Not Too Young To Run’ campaign in Nigeria to elevate the promotion of young people’s right to run for public office and address the widespread issue of age discrimination.

This is also the fourth priority area of the UN Youth Strategy, Youth 2030, launched by the UN Secretary-General in 2018, focusing on young people’s human rights and their civic and political engagement through the promotion of young people’s right to participate in public affairs, including in political and civic processes, platforms and institutions at all levels, such as elections, constitution-making processes, political parties and Parliaments.

Young people’s ability to run for public office is a right, but age discrimination laws often prevent them from doing so. Removing legal barriers to running for public office is the right thing to do and gives everyone an equal chance. The active participation of young people in electoral politics is essential to thriving and representative democracies worldwide. Young people must have every right to engage fully in the democratic process, and that includes the right for young people to run for office themselves.

I believe that young people today have the energy, and the right to run for public office and that any efforts to prevent them from doing so serve to limit citizen participation. Research supports this by demonstrating that there is a correlation between lower eligibility ages and higher levels of youth representation, with lower legal thresholds fostering a climate in which young people are more likely to come forward and be elected to Parliament at an earlier age. The ‘Not Too Young To Run’ campaign brought to global scale a movement which started in Nigeria and seeks to elevate the promotion of young people’s right to run for public office and inspire young people everywhere to actively engage in formal politics.

Parliamentarians should diligently call for the alignment of the voting age and the age of eligibility to run for office in any given election and advocate for youth rights to run for office, and showcase young leaders in elected positions. This, in turn, will surely inspire young people to run for office themselves along with legislation moving the participation age in the favour of young people. Currently, youth compete in a very unequal state in election processes, because they don’t have public acknowledgement and the experience of a political career, or are crushed by the absence of internal democracy in parties. They lack access to financing sources and a political party structure. Continued training on political skills, financing election campaigns, including young people on the board of political parties and guaranteeing a minimal space for participation of youth in electoral lists are some measures that can be taken to enhance political participation of young people.

Furthermore, Parliamentarians can proactively move towards legislation that promotes youth engagement such as in Peru where 10% of the municipal government must be comprised of youth representatives; in Morocco, the electoral law includes 30 seats reserved for candidates who are less than 40 years old; in Kenya, they reserve 5 seats in the Parliament to youth representatives; in the last elections in Tunisia, each electoral list had to include a young candidate who was less than 30 years old; in Uganda, they reserve 12 seats to represent special interests, youth included; people with disabilities and workers; in Rwanda, the National Council of Youth elects two members to the Chamber of Deputies; in the Philippines, there exists a stipulation to include youth in parties’ lists systems.

As we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the United Nations in 2020, we must openly recognise that the active participation of young people in electoral politics worldwide is essential to ensure...
The pandemic has brought to light the multiple and intersecting inequalities that define our world, with women and girls often the hardest hit across every sphere; from health to the economy, security and social protection. Women are the majority of workers in healthcare, and in sectors that leave them vulnerable to the impacts of the economic downturn. Millions of girls are out of school, putting them at greater risk of child marriage, female genital mutilation, unintended pregnancies, and HIV infection. A ‘shadow pandemic’ of gender-based violence has arisen in situations of lockdown, while women’s access to justice and to sexual and reproductive health services has been compromised, and their unpaid care work is increasing. This situation is further compounded by the double discrimination many women and girls face due to their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, age, migration status and many other factors. If we do not take concerted action, we risk reversing the limited gains made on women’s rights and empowerment in the past decades.

Over the past several months, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought on devastating health and economic shocks, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems around the world and amplifying existing inequalities, especially for the most marginalized. These challenges have given new dimensions to UN Women’s work on gender equality and women’s empowerment and reaffirmed the urgent need to converge-magazine-volume-2/

In this 75 th year of the United Nations, our commitment to multilateralism and collaboration has never been more critical. The year 2020 is also the 10th Anniversary of the adoption of the IPU’s Resolution on ‘Youth participation in the democratic process’, which called on Parliaments to “begin the minimum voting age with the minimum age of eligibility to run for office to ensure greater participation by youth in Parliaments.”

1 Youth 2030: The UN Youth Strategy https://www.un.org/youthenvy/youthenvy/

2 Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). Young People’s Political Participation Conducting a Dialogue (part 2) https://www.sida.se/contentassets/a082681c6c49f59c9df538e0c1f66bf51043.pdf


8 Youth Participation in National Parliaments, IPU, 2018.


10 UN Women and leadership in the era of COVID-19 One key indication of societies out of balance is the lack of women in leadership and decision-making roles at every level of society, and in national, regional and local level deliberative bodies. To build back better and achieve gender equality, women must be able to lead and participate fully in decision-making, both on the COVID-19 response and recovery and across all areas of public life.

In several countries, including in the Commonwealth, we see powerful examples of how women’s leadership and participation can provide a more effective, inclusive and fair response to the pandemic. Yet, while women’s political participation has increased over the last few decades, it is still far from equal. The latest data from UN Women and the Inter-Parliamentary Union show that women comprise just 24.9% of Members of Parliament and 20.5% of Speakers of Parliament. They are Heads of State and Government in only 22 countries.

Women and leadership in the era of COVID-19

Women’s empowerment is inextricably connected to this vision. It is an essential element for achieving the ideas set out in the UN Charter in 1945, and it underlies the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including through a standalone goal (SDG5).

The year 2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, when 189 countries came together to unanimously adopt the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a groundbreaking blueprint for women’s rights. The extraordinary circumstances of the current moment demand that we unite in that same spirit of global solidarity, and bring to the fore the importance of multilateralism in the promotion of gender equality and the human rights of all women and girls.
Yet, experience and evidence has demonstrated that when women participate in decision-making processes, more inclusive decisions are made, diverse voices are heard, and different solutions are created. This leads to better outcomes for everyone. When women are equally represented in Parliaments, they are better able raise the profile of key issues, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, childcare and equal pay, as well as broader development issues, such as the alleviation of poverty. In the context of COVID-19, women Parliamentarians can play a key role in driving political, media and public attention to the pandemic’s disproportionate socio-economic impact on women who are overrepresented in informal and vulnerable employment, as well as to the need for essential services to address the spike in domestic violence during lockdowns. Having more women in high-level positions also challenges discriminatory social norms and stereotypes and sends a message that women leaders are just as legitimate and capable as men.

Opportunities for action
Parliamentarians play a vital role in dismantling the persistent obstacles, both in law and in culture, to women’s leadership. For instance, discriminatory laws, systems and attitudes about women’s ability to lead can hinder their ability to participate in politics and decision-making roles, while violence against women remains one of the most serious obstacles to the realization of women’s political, social and economic rights today. Despite this reality, the political will to change the status quo is often lacking.

UN Women’s Call to Action to Parliamentarians provides a framework for tackling these barriers. Launched in 2019, at the Annual Summit of Women Political Leaders (WPL) ahead of the G-20 Summit in Tokyo, Japan, it calls on Parliamentarians around the world to build on Member States’ experiences and best practices on how to achieve a gender equal world through legislation and parliamentary work, focusing on five key acceleration points: 1) Ending discriminatory laws; 2) Increasing the number of women in Parliaments, Cabinets and leadership; 3) Implementing progressive law reforms; 4) Challenging norms and traditional gender stereotyping; 5) Supporting other women in politics.

The Call to Action is part of UN Women’s Generation Equality campaign, which is bringing together Member States, civil society organizations, UN agencies, young people and the private sector to take urgent action for gender equality. A multilateral, multigenerational approach is at the heart of Generation Equality, and its six Action Coalitions, one of which will be focused on Feminist Movements and Leadership. The issue of women’s leadership will also top the agenda at the 65th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2021, which will have a priority theme focused on women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence.

A critical part of addressing the issue of women’s leadership and participation is challenging the perception of what a leader looks like. The initiative Leaders for Generation Equality, launched in cooperation with the Council of Women World Leaders (CWWL), is bringing together leaders from business, academia, civil society, politics, youth movements and entertainment – from the Prime Minister of Iceland and CWWL Chair, Katrín Jakobsdóttir, and the former President of Malawi, Joyce Banda, to #MeToo founder Tarana Burke, and footballer and UN Women Goodwill Ambassador, Marta Vieira Da Silva. In lending their voices, impact and power to advocating for Generation Equality, and the empowerment of all women and girls, they are breaking down gender norms and stereotypes and providing powerful role models for girls and young women.

Working together for the future we want
As much as the pandemic has challenged us, it has also connected us, and shown that we cannot go back to the status quo. The recent rise in activism and movements speaking out against racial injustice, including its intersection with gender inequality, homophobia and other forms of discrimination is leading to a global reckoning with the structures, systems and unconscious biases that sustain inequality, including within our own organizations. As we rebuild from conflict and Coronavirus, let us heed the UN Secretary-General’s call to reject inequality and division, and embrace a shared vision of peace and equal opportunities, rights and freedoms of all for all. It’s up to us, as the UN and as UN Women, to defend the values upon which we were founded, and to amplify the voices of women and girls around the world.

I urge Parliamentarians across the Commonwealth, and around the world, to use their positions and power to ensure political accountability on gender equality commitments and to sound the siren for urgent political action to fulfill the commitments of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals. By supporting the changing of discriminatory laws, working to boost the number of women in leadership positions and defying the gender stereotypes that hold women back, Parliamentarians can accelerate impactful change for women and girls.

Together, we can ensure that 2020 will not merely be remembered as the year of the COVID-19 pandemic, but as the year we took significant steps towards an equal world for women and girls. That is the future we want, and the future the world needs.

References:
3. https://forum.generationequality.org/leaders-generation-equality
UN WOMEN’S 10TH ANNIVERSARY, THE FUTURE OF GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN THE COMMONWEALTH

On 2 July 2010, the UN General Assembly adopted a landmark resolution to merge four parts of the United Nations system into the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women – known as UN Women. Now ten years on from this historical turning point, UN Women has marked its 10th anniversary which is a significant achievement that should be celebrated by all individuals, but in particular, non-governmental entities and organisations committed to advancing gender equality such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association’s (CPA) network for women Parliamentarians, the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP).

UN Women works globally in around 90 countries delivering a remarkable overflow of activities and programmes that focus on areas of priority such as women’s leadership and political participation, economic empowerment, ending violence against women, peace and security, humanitarian action and much more. However, despite the successes it has achieved throughout recent years, the recent outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID-19) reveals that there is still more work to be done by global institutions to achieve gender equality.

In a statement made by Her Excellency Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women on the 10 year anniversary of UN Women, she asserted that “in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the human rights of women and girls have more prominence, universality and more urgency than ever before.”

Research conducted by the United Nations on the impact of COVID-19 on women, has shown that in two Commonwealth countries, Cyprus and Singapore, since the outbreak of COVID-19, domestic violence helplines have registered a rise in calls of 30% and 33% respectively.2 UNICEF published findings that demonstrate domestic violence helplines have registered a rise in calls of 30% in countries, Cyprus and Singapore, since the outbreak of COVID-19, to put women and girls at the centre of their recovery efforts that “limited gains in gender equality and women’s rights made over the decades are in danger of being rolled back due to the COVID-19 pandemic.”3

Parliaments across the Commonwealth must strive to ensure that women are heard and equally represented in all areas of decision-making in order to contribute to the successful resolution of challenges and issues that have not only arisen during this period of great difficulty but that could appear in the near future. It is therefore now more important than ever that the CWP continues to exert its influence across the Commonwealth.

As an entity that has celebrated over 30 years of service dedicated to advancing issues around gender equality, has advocated for better representation of women in Parliament, and provided capacity building tailored to women Parliamentarians’ roles as legislators, scrutineers and representatives, the CWP is committed to championing gender equality and the empowerment of women across the Commonwealth as recognised in the Commonwealth Charter. Now over 3,000 women strong and represented in over 180 Parliaments and Legislatures, the CWP is devoted to supporting all branches belonging to the membership of the CPA to work towards obtaining the targets needed to achieve SDG 5.

After a series of consultations with members of the CWP International Steering Committee, women Parliamentarians and Parliaments from across the Commonwealth, the CWP took another formidable step towards supporting women Parliamentarians by officially realising its three-year Strategic Plan for the years 2020 to 2022 on 14 August 2020. The CWP Strategic Plan is underpinned by four key principles which will guide the work of the CWP across the next three years:

- Maximising the role of women Parliamentarians; building the capacity of women Parliamentarians; advocating for mentoring and knowledge sharing amongst women Parliamentarians and proactively encourage women Parliamentarians to take a central role in gender mainstreaming at all levels of decision making.
- Many Regions of the CPA have already been proactive in delivering impactful work needed to achieve the outputs and outcomes of the Strategic Plan. In February 2020, the CWP British Islands and Mediterranean Region held their 7th annual Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Regional Conference in the Falkland Islands where Members in attendance discussed pertinent issues such as combating gender stereotypes in small communities, mentoring of women Parliamentarians and creating opportunities for women in the future in small communities, encouraging women to stand for public office amongst many other subjects. In addition, the CWP Pacific Region also held their CWP Regional Conference in February 2020 in Nuie, to discuss gender equality and effective communication, with MPs attending from across the Region. In July of this year, the CWP Australia Region launched their CWP Australia website that seeks to raise awareness of their Regional activities and action agenda but also highlights and outstanding achievements such as having over 40% women in Parliaments in the Region.
- The CWP Chairperson also participated in a webinar on the ‘Impact of COVID-19 on Women’s Entrepreneurship: Challenges and Opportunities’ hosted by UN Women Pakistan, the African Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank where she spoke alongside a number of key speakers from the CPA Asia Region. With many more activities and programmes currently being planned for the remainder of the year, this is just the beginning of many of the CWP network’s accomplishments.
- Despite many Parliaments facing delays and challenges during this period of uncertainty, the year 2020 has presented itself with some success in increasing the representation of women in Parliaments across the Commonwealth that should not be disregarded. The Parliament of Kiribati made history in their elections that took place in April 2020 with Members of Parliament voting for the country’s first female Speaker of Parliament, and an additional four women Parliamentarians were elected, the highest number of women in their Parliament so far.

As CWP looks ahead to the implementation of its strategy to promote the representation of women Parliamentarians and issues relating to gender, the success and achievements of the CWP network can serve as a great example to women Parliamentarians, Parliaments, organisations and institutions within and beyond the Commonwealth.

The CWP continues to work with UN Women and many other International stakeholders to ensure that women Parliamentarians belonging to the CWP membership are supported and that the CWP continues to deliver important work in the way of achieving the network’s goals of increased female representation and gender equality in Parliaments across the Commonwealth.

References:

Ms Bénite Dibateza is a Programmes Officer at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Headquarters Secretariat and she has specific responsibility as the Coordinator for the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network.
Patrick Rouble served as the Member of the Legislative Assembly of Yukon in Canada for Southern Lakes from 2002 to 2011. He was the Territory’s Minister of Education for five years. He is currently Principal Consultant at Transom Frame Consulting. He recently received a Doctorate in Education from the University of Calgary and his dissertation examined the experiences of several Canadian Provincial Ministers of Education.

The education portfolio is one of the most important in government. A former Education Minister from Yukon, Canada gives an insight into his experience of the role.

Education is a significant portfolio in any provincial or territorial cabinet. The Education Minister must work with others to accomplish specific functions that affect individual students and society as a whole. They are widely seen to have a key role in shaping the future, and as such the pressure on them to perform well and succeed is immense.

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This insight into the role of the Minister of Education is a personal reflection on the role, as well as a broad overview of the nature of the position. It includes examination of leadership theories, policy development, and the importance of education in society.

The Minister of Education is a significant portfolio. It involves about 81% of the former Ministers of Education across Canada, whether they are in the West, the Prairies, or the Maritimes. The Minister is often called upon to be a representative, an expert in charge of a portfolio, and an elected official. They are involved in a wide range of areas, from curriculum development to budgetary decisions.

One of the challenges faced by Ministers is the need to balance multiple perspectives and interests. They must be able to work with stakeholders, including students, parents, and other elected officials, to develop policies that meet the needs of the province.

The Minister of Education is often seen as a leader, a decision-maker, and a communicator. They must be able to communicate their vision and goals to the public, as well as to work with other government officials to develop policies that will benefit the province.

In order to understand the role of the Minister of Education, it is important to examine the experiences and perspectives of those who have held the position. This includes not only the Minister of Education, but also the former Ministers of Education from across the country.

Some interesting statistics about Ministers of Education are:
- The average time holding the position was just under two years. Only 34 people (42%) had held the position for more than two years. The breakdown by gender was 62% male and 38% female. And, 52% of the Ministers had a substantial background in education either having been employed in the field or having received post-secondary education in the field.
- The average number of years in the role was 5.6, with a range of 0 to 20 years. The breakdown by gender was 62% male and 38% female. And, 52% of the Ministers had a substantial background in education either having been employed in the field or having received post-secondary education in the field.
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This information provides a glimpse into the experiences and perspectives of those who have held the position of Minister of Education, and highlights the challenges and responsibilities that come with the role.

The purpose of my study was not to determine why people become politicians, but to become more aware of the complexity of the role. The purpose of my study was not to determine why people become politicians, but to become more aware of the complexity of the role. The purpose of my study was not to determine why people become politicians, but to become more aware of the complexity of the role.

In other words, they wanted to change the identity of the province. By changing legislation, policy, and budget expenditures, governments affect the people in the province. And, by changing habits. Almost 10 people out of 50 in their study made changes, such as putting a subject matter expert in charge of a portfolio. In order to hear from a fairly broad spectrum of people and to gather good stories, I interviewed five former Ministers of Education in Canada. About 81% of the former Ministers of Education across Canada, whether they are in the West, the Prairies, or the Maritimes, have held the position for more than two years. The breakdown by gender was 62% male and 38% female. And, 52% of the Ministers had a substantial background in education either having been employed in the field or having received post-secondary education in the field.

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The Parliamentarian | 2020: Issue Three | 100 years of publishing 1920-2020

The Minister of Education is often expected to be the voice of the government, the capacity and position of their department, the philosophy of their political party, and the identity and perform a complex role. Before Ministers speak, they must explain or defend why the department suggested the departmental meetings, they present the department's expected to be the voice of their constituents and other previously discussed forces including decisions made: the belief that the decision was wrong; and other previously discussed forces. 

The Minister of Education is expected to voice a complex identity and perform a complex role. Ministers speak, they must consider the position of the government, the capacity and position of their department, the philosophy of their political party, the platform they committed to implementing, the opinions of people in the province, and their own personal knowledge and beliefs. Being trusted by others to be their voice is a profound responsibility that significantly influences the Minister. When I asked participants whether they were often presented with specific questions that had been written by others, some commented that they never delivered a speech exactly as written, and others in the prepared speech was often incorporated into what they said, but, ultimately, they decided what to say and how to say it, something they found to be an important concept. The Minister of Education is often expected to be an interpreter, or a bridge, between various groups. 

Being the Minister of Education involves being seen as a public figure, making decisions and then working with others to accomplish specific functions that affect stakeholders directly and indirectly. Minister needs to be trusted and needs to trust others. Trust has a variety of definitions and interpretations. In some cases, someone who is trusted is expected to act in the best interests of others. In trust, others involve believing or accepting something without seeking verification or evidence for it. 

Education Ministers are involved in a diverse array of relationships that affect trust - relationships in which they are expected to take another’s perspective into account when making decisions. They are trusted by party members, constituents, and the Premier in the process of becoming a public figure. Before Ministers speak, they have relationships with Cabinet colleagues that are influenced by the concept of Cabinet solidarity and appointed leaders. They have relationships with their department and other people in the field of education, including subject matter experts, administrators, and teachers. As participants in the provincial budget process, they have a relationship with taxpayers. As the person ultimately responsible for the education system, they also have a relationship with students. And, they have relationships with staff, the media, and other stakeholders. 

The issue of whether an MLA is a trustee or a delegate - one who votes as constituents direct, and one who is trusted or has their own judgment - was discussed with some of the participants. Several said that they represent themselves and that they were expected to represent their constituents, they often found themselves in complex situations that required situational and contextual consideration. They had time and resources to study issues in more depth than most constituents. The policy-making process and the responsibility to look at an issue from multiple perspectives. But, at the end of the day, they told a decision that they could personally live with. In addition to trusting the Premier and other Cabinet Ministers, the Minister of Education must also trust the staff of the department. When asked about this situation, one participant said that when she first started in the position, she questioned who these people were and what they expected from to, and if they were aligned with another political party. However, she soon realised the professionalism of the public servants that she worked with and trusted them. Conversely, another participant shared a story about a former Minister who had been at the centre of an embroiling issue for the government later campaign. It seems that the Minister is required to trust the department for the actions of those in the department. Participants shared stories of education officials in the system who did something that certain citizens did not agree with. They were able to defend the actions of the individuals; in others, the Minister overturned the decisions. People in the system were trusted to carry out their duties; but, if they did not carry them out in a manner that was satisfactory, the Minister was able to make decisions to take action. This showed that education was expected - trusted - to become involved. Some participants also shared that it was often expected to test the concept of the public losing trust in politicians. One said, “We’ve allowed, as a society, the media and others, to test the loyalty of all (politicians) as leaders and cheats. And that we are only in it for ourselves and that we can’t be trusted by the people; that is why Education Ministers are expected to prepare people for the future and to put in place education programs to ensure that everyone will behave as they should so that individual and societal problems are remedied. With such lofty expectations, it means that there are few people who stand in the position and that most in the position last fewer than two years. The Minister of Education is expected to be an authority on education and to make decisions affecting the provincial education system. The Minister has the authority to establish courses of study, approve curriculum, set funding priorities, and exercise other considerable powers. However, expert knowledge of education is not a requirement for becoming a Minister of Education. Ministers are appointed to the position for multiple reasons. They may therefore face situations in which they lack specific subject matter knowledge to make informed decisions. They rely on the advice of others. Therefore, Ministers rely on the other previously discussed forces that influence decision-making, and other “trust their gut.” Education is also political. Elected decision-makers – politicians - at multiple levels, including school councils, school boards, associations, and Provincial Assemblies, are entrusted with the power to make education decisions. Some of the education is distributed throughout the system, but accountability for decision-making is not. Having left political office, I have been an interesting, enlightening, and rewarding experience to go back and relate to policymakers through the experiences of former Education Ministers. I have had a chance to reflect on their experiences and to draw insights into what it means to be the Minister of Education. There were many “a-ha” moments and times when I wished I had known then what I know now. Being a Cabinet Minister, a representative, and a politician is an important position in our society, one too important to be left up to partisanship and political expediency. We need to treat the job seriously, preparing new people for the positions we entrust them with. I hope that this analysis encourages further discussion about the role and activities of the Minister of Education. I sincerely hope that it encourages Ministers to think about their role and the important issues in education. Additionally, I hope that it encourages others to look at the thoughts and perspectives of those who have been in positions of responsibility, authority, and power. By better understanding the experience, the expectations, and the underlying systems, we can, I hope, make better, more informed decisions that result in more optimal and intentional outcomes.

This article was initially published in the Canadian Parliamentary Review (2019). The article is based on the full dissertation, Anxiety, Authority, and Accountability: The Experience of Being a Minister Responsible for Education, which can be found online.

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DECriminalising the electoral system in India: Reforms by the Judiciary

On 13 February 2020, the Supreme Court of India directed that political parties should upload on their websites detailed information regarding individuals with pending criminal cases, who have been selected as candidates, along with reasons for such selection. The parties were also ordered to explain as to why other individuals without criminal antecedents could not be found for nomination.

The reasons for selection shall be with reference to the qualifications, achievements and merit of the candidate concerned, and not mere ‘winnability’ at the polls. The Court issued these directions in exercise of its constitutional powers under Articles 226 and 142 of the Constitution of India, while delivering a judgment in a Contempt Petition filed against the Election Commission.

The Court further enjoined that information regarding the selected candidate’s criminal antecedents should be published in one local vernacular newspaper and one national newspaper, as well as on official social media platforms of the political party, including Facebook and Twitter. These details shall be published within 48 hours of the selection of the candidate or not less than two weeks before the first date of filing of nominations, whichever is earlier. The political party concerned shall then submit a report of compliance to the Election Commission within 72 hours of the selection of the said candidate. If a political party fails to submit such compliance report, the Election Commission shall bring to the notice of the Supreme Court as being in contempt of the Court’s direction.

The Court also noted that over the last four general elections there had been an alarming increase in the incidence of criminality in politics. In 2004, 24% of the Members of Parliament had criminal cases pending against them; in 2009, it went up to 30%; in 2014 to 34%; and in 2019 as many as 43% of MPs had criminal cases pending against them.

For the Apex Judicial Court of the country to issue such detailed Executive instructions is by itself an expression of its anguish and frustration at the failure of the political ecosystem, in general, and the Parliament, in particular, to take adequate steps to keep persons with established criminal backgrounds away from the sacred portals of the country’s legislative bodies, in spite of the Court having nudged them, from time to time, in this regard in the past.

The Contempt Petition in relation to which the Supreme Court delivered the aforementioned order, relates to its judgment delivered on 25 September 2018 (Public Interest Foundation & Ors Vs Union Of India & Anr) in which the Court had issued the following directions:

- Each contesting candidate shall fill up the form as provided by the Election Commission and the form must contain all the particulars as required therein.
- It shall state, in bold letters, the criminal cases pending against the candidate.
- If a candidate is contesting an election on the ticket of a particular party, he/she is required to inform the party about the criminal cases pending against him/her.
- The concerned political party shall be obligated to put up on its website the aforesaid information pertaining to candidates having criminal antecedents.
- The candidate as well as the concerned political party shall issue a declaration in widely circulated newspapers in the locality about the antecedents of the candidate and also give wide publicity in the electronic media. When we say wide publicity, we mean that it shall be done at least thrice after the filling of the nomination papers.

It cannot be more specific than that, as far as a Court’s directions can go, but still compliance did not follow. In all fairness, it must be mentioned that the five-judge Constitution Bench also held that a candidate cannot be disqualified merely because charges have been framed against him/her in a criminal case. The Bench also observed that time had come for the Parliament to make a low to ensure that persons facing serious criminal cases do not enter into the political stream. In all fairness, again, the Election Commission on 10 October 2018 accordingly issued a circular stating that the candidates at all elections are required to file an affidavit in Form-26, along with the nomination paper, declaring information about criminal cases, assets, liabilities and educational qualifications (some of these requirements were in compliance of earlier judgments of the Supreme Court).

The Form included Tables for the candidate to publish in newspapers and on TV and, for the political party to publish on its website, full details of the candidate’s criminal antecedents. The candidates are thus required to publish the details in newspapers of wide circulation and make at least three insertions on three different dates after the last date of withdrawal. The declarations have also to be aired on television channels on three different dates. The matter must be published in font size of not less than 12. The copies of these insertions have to be supplied to the Election Commission along with the account of poll expenses. However, apparently this initiative did not yield the desired results.

The Supreme Court’s crusade against criminalisation of politics is a long drawn out saga. In recent times, it all began in 2002 (Association for Democratic Reforms vs. Union of India), when the Supreme Court mandated the disclosure of information relating to criminal antecedents, educational qualifications and personnel assets of candidates contesting elections. According to the Court, seeking this information was part of the Fundamental Right of the voter to be informed all relevant details about a candidate, it was an extension of the freedom of expression [Article 19 (1) (a)].

Subsequently, in 2013, on a petition filed by Lily Thomas and Lok Prahari NGO, the Supreme Court ordered that if a sitting MP or MLA is convicted in a case, punishment for which was more than 2 years of imprisonment, then he or she would be disqualified immediately and the seat would be declared as vacant; thus setting aside clause 8(4) of the Representation of People’s Act, 1951. Clause 8(4) provided special privilege to MPs or MLAs to hold the office even after conviction, if an appeal had been filed in a higher court within a period of 3 months of conviction. In 2013 again, in the case of People’s Union for Civil Liberties vs Union of India and Anr, the Supreme Court recognised negative voting as a constitutional right of a voter and directed the government to provide a ‘NOTA’ (None of The Above) option in the EVM (Electoral Voting Machine).

Further, on a petition filed by Subramani Swamy, the Supreme Court directed the Election Commission to introduce Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT). But thereby hangs a tale, to be recounted in another article.

In 2014, in Public Interest Foundation vs. Union of India, based on the recommendations of the Law Commission, the Supreme Court ordered that criminal trial pending against any Member of Parliament or Member of Legislative Assembly must be disposed of within a period of one year from the date of framing of the charge. Taking it from there, in 2017, the Supreme Court directed that the government should set up special courts to exclusively conduct time-bound trials of lawmakers accused of corruption and criminality. The government accordingly set up...
In 2007, the 18th Report presented by a Parliamentary Committee to the Rajya Sabha had expressed a strong feeling that politics should be cleansed of persons with established criminal background. “Criminalisation of politics is the bane of society and negation of democracy,” the Report said. The Law Commission, in its 244th Report submitted in 2014, put it succinctly. “Instead of politicians having suspected links/connections, as was the case earlier, it was persons with extensive criminal background who entered political life.”

The foregone account of the judgments of the Supreme Court, as well as the reports of several Committees and the Law Commission, makes it amply clear that there is no death of wisdom and experience, coupled with guidelines and instructions, for improving the electoral ecosystem. The exhaustive observations of the Supreme Court and the Parliamentary Committees notwithstanding, the will to cleanse the system of criminal elements is missing among those who have been vested with the power to decide. The million-dollar question, as usual, is: “Who will belt the cat?”

The expectation from the present judgment of the Supreme Court seems to be that the embarrassment of having to justify the criminal records of candidates may deter the political parties from nominating them and they may become more discriminating in their choices of candidates. But boasting and shaming, will it work? It is a billion-dollar question, of course.

An earlier version of this article was published in India Legal (a magazine) under the title ‘Cleansing the Rot’.

In the second of a three-part series, this article looks at the origins and history of some of the parliamentary expressions and practices used in many Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures.

PARLIAMENTARY EXPERIENCES AND PRACTICES

PART TWO

“Whips” Political parties have a significant role in the working of a democratic polity. ‘Whips’ in turn have role cut out for them in smooth conduct of party affairs particularly in matters pertaining to House proceedings. The outcome of their endeavours and the efficacy of ‘whips’ is manifest in the effective conduct of the passage of legislation and from a larger perspective, the House proceedings.

A ‘whip’ is a person, a critical office bearer who also issues directives or manages directions issued by the party. Simply put, ‘whips’ are the office bearers of political or Legislative party officers with certain assigned tasks. ‘Whips’ are Members of Parliament who are appointed by each party in Parliament to help organise their party’s contribution to parliamentary business. One of their responsibilities is making sure the maximum number of their party Members vote, and vote the party’s directives. The use of the word ‘whip’ within the UK Parliament has its roots in the 18th century hunting terminology ‘whipper-in’ where it refers to a huntsman’s assistant who drives straying hounds back to the main pack using a whip.

In many Parliaments, ‘whips’ frequently act as the ‘tellers’ (counting votes in divisions). They also manage the ‘pairing system’ whereby Members of opposing parties both agree not to vote when other business (such as a Select Committee visit overseas) prevents them from being present in Parliament. ‘Whips’ are also largely responsible (together with the Leader of the House) for arranging the business of Parliament. In this role they are frequently referred to as the usual channels.

‘Whips’ is also the term given to the directives or voting instructions given to Members by the party, usually in a weekly notice. In their connotation as party directives or orders, the ‘whips’ or directions are said to be of three types—a one-line, two-line or three-line ‘whips’. These are so called by the number of lines by which their text is underlined. The number of lines is indicative of the importance and urgency attached to a particular measure before the House.

Colours used in the UK Houses of Parliament: In the Westminster system of parliamentary democracies, the colour Green is associated with the Lower House (usually comprising of directly elected representatives of the people) and Red within the Upper House (the House of Lords or appointed representatives, by and large popularly known in the UK as the House of Lords). Originating in the UK Parliament at Westminster, these traditional colours have been adopted by many Commonwealth Parliaments over the years. These colour codes have an interesting legacy behind them and they have emerged as a time-honoured convention.

House of Commons (Green) The principal colour for furnishings and fabrics throughout the Chamber and corridors used by the UK Parliament’s House of Commons, except in some of the carpets which were designed for the post-Second World War rebuilding, where a mottled brown was used. From 1911, volumes of Hansard for the House of Commons were published in shades of blue. Similarly, the name of the second House, the Upper House, is ‘Red’.

The Parliamentarian | 2020: Issue Three | 100 years of publishing 1920-2020 | 255

"In the Westminster system of parliamentary democracies, the colour Green is associated with the Lower House (usually comprising of directly elected representatives of the people) and Red within the Upper House (the House of Elders or appointed representatives)."
The colour Green, both in historical records and on the walls of Westminster, was given prominence out of loyalty to, or to curry favour with, the Crown. Not only did the King use green, but the high officials of the King's household also used it for their private offices near to the Lords’ Chamber. For the coronation of James II in 1685, an order was made to the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod for ‘as much green serge as will hang the Archbishop of Canterbury’s room, the Lord Chancellor’s, the Lord Treasurer’s and the Lord Great Chamberlain’s’, to be done in all respects as they were before.’ As a calm, peaceful colour for an office it was ideal, and the noise-absorbing fabric was no doubt tacked to the walls. It is of interest to note that at this time, theatres began to adopt the use of green from at least 1700. The colour was used widely for curtains, seats and even the stage itself, which became known as ‘the Green Rooms’ used for actors waiting to go on stage, has survived, at least in name, to the present time. As a theatre of debate at the centre of Parliament, it is not surprising to see the parallel employment of the colour both in the parliamentary chamber as well as in the commercial theatre.

The use of green in the UK House of Commons

The UK House of Commons, before they took up residence in the former royal chapel of St Stephen’s at Westminster, had travelled the country borrowing temporarily various halls and cathedral chapter houses, but settling when at Westminster either in the refectory or chapter house of the Abbey. They also sat for some time in the hall of the Black Friars. There are no records of this, or of their various other meeting places, being decorated in green, but it is not beyond the realms of possibility that they actually brought green with them to St Stephen’s.

The St Stephen’s Chapel, where the UK House of Commons sat from c.1548 to 1684, had been rebuilt under Edward I (1272-1307) and Edward II (1307-1327). and completed, painted and decorated during the reign of Edward III (1327-1377). St Stephen’s Chapel must have given the impression of being a kaleidoscope of colours. The roof, we know, was blue, with gilded stars, and below the windows, above the corrices, were many painted Biblical characters and stories; the columns were decorated with ‘pryntes’, the east and west depictions of the Holy Family and King Edward III and his family. Maurice Hastings argued that the whole of the building was “ablaze with colour... hardly an inch of stonework was not painted or heavily gilded” “But there is no direct evidence that green figured on a large scale in these decorations.

When the Chapel was converted after 1548 for use by the House of Commons, Hastings presumed that hangings or tapestries of some kind were installed to cover the religious wall decorations. Later, these were replaced by wainscot paneling. It would then have been these panels which gave a predominating colour to the Chamber, but records of their colouring do not appear to have survived. The decoration at high level was whitewashed to achieve a Puritan simplicity, in the same way as most other churches and chapels at this time.

The first authoritative mention of the use of green in furnishing fabrics in the Chamber occurs in a book of travels by De Monconys, published in Lyons, France in 1662. The House, he says, “est une chambre mediterraneen grande, environrée de six ou sept rangs de dégez, couvert de sarge verte, et disposee en amphiteatre...” A moderately large room, surrounded by six or seven graduated rows of seats covered in green serge, and positioned in the form of an amphitheatre.

So it would appear that over 300 years ago, as now, the House of Commons benches were green, but upholstered in serge for some other woollen fabric; the exact meaning of serge is now lost. Then as now the rows of seats were ranged in tiers (“en amphitheatré”). In 1670, a payment was recorded to the Serjeant Painter for “paynting green in oyle the end of the seates, and a doreasse...” at the House of Commons. Similarly, the Lord Chamberlain’s accounts for 1672-3 record purchases of green woollen cloth for the House of Commons Chamber.

As early as 1698, seats had been provided at a public trial in their distinctive colours for the two Houses. In 1685, a positive writer of green furnishing was ordered: ‘the Speaker’s Chair and footstool to be new covered with green velvet, with a green velvet cushion, all trimmed with silk fringe; the table to be covered with a carpet of green cloth, with a silk fringe and a leather carpet to cover it; six green cloth cushions, trimmed with silk fringe, to stand for the window curtains; the seats of the House to be mended and repaired; green serge to hang the lobby where the messengers from the House of Lords retire, green serge curtain for the serjeant’s window in his little room’.
Red in the UK House of Lords

In the UK House of Lords, usage of the colour red, probably stems from its use by kings and queens, as a royal colour and its consequent employment in the room where the monarch met their court and nobles. The use of the red in Upper Houses of Parliament also probably stems from the use by the sovereignty of red as a royal colour. The UK House of Lords Chamber adopted crimson, denoting royal authority and avoided the green colour of the ‘Other Place’. Many Upper Houses in Commonwealth Parliaments have adopted the red colour for their chambers, denoting the seniority of their Legislative Chamber.

‘Dress Code’ in Houses of Parliament

Sartorial practices such as the wearing of the ceremonial robe and wig by the Speaker of Parliament and the wearing of robes by the Clerk of the House is an integral part of the House of Commons. Robes and wigs were only worn today for special occasions in the UK Parliament, such as here at the State Opening of Parliament in December 2019.

Above: Ceremonial robes are often only worn today for special occasions in the UK Parliament, such as here at the State Opening of Parliament in December 2019, which emanate from the UK Parliament.

Robes and wigs worn by

Presiding Officers and Clerks of the House

The official dress of the Speaker and Officers of the House in the UK Parliament is described in Sir Peter Thorne’s Book: Practice and Usage, which has varied, and at certain periods in the past, non-conformity with the ruling fashion has been a political statement, as with Oliver Cromwell. Sir Peter Thorne’s Book: “His linen was plain and not very clean... his hat without a hatband... plain cloth suit... made by an ill country tailor”.

In the eighteenth century, formally was the rule and the fashion of wearing wigs caught on: they are retained today in the wigs of the Speaker and Clerks.

In the UK Parliament, recent Speakers starting with Rt Hon. Baroness Boothroyd and recently, Rt Hon. John Bercow chose not to wear a wig in the House of Commons. Since February 2017, the Clerks of the House of Commons and other Clerks of the House have discontinued from wearing wigs. On 6 February 2017, the then Speaker of the House of Commons made a short statement announcing that Clerks would no longer be required to wear wigs and court dress in the House of Commons. However, the wearing of wigs to indicate their expertise in parliamentary procedure was continued. There was some controversy as the Members of the House were not consulted with regards to the changes. The Clerk of the House of Commons still wears a wig for state opening and prolongation. In House of Lords while Lord Speaker too no longer wears a wig, the Clerk of the House of Lords and other Clerks of the House continue to wear wigs. Hats were another aspect of parliamentary etiquette.

They were generally worn in the Chamber, but not when addressing the House, nor entering or leaving it. In the late nineteenth century, the tail hat was de rigueur.

The wearing of tail hats was challenged by Keir Hardie, who always wore a soft cap, and also through the Speaker’s allowing a soft cap to Joseph Cowen, ‘since the rigidity of the top hat subjected him to headache’.

At this time, the Whips were the only Members not to wear hats. Alfred Kinney MP, in 1900, summed up the hat-wearing rules as follows: “At all times, remove your hat on entering the House, and put it on upon taking your seat, and remove it again on rising for whatever purpose. If the MP asks a question he will stand, and with his hat off; and he may receive the answer of the Minister seated and with his hat on. If on a division he should have to challenge the ruling of the chair, he will sit and put his hat on. If he wishes to address the Speaker on a point not ordered not connected with a division, he will do so standing with his hat off. When he leaves the House to participate in a division he will take his hat off, but will vote with it on. If the Queen sends a message to be read from the chair, the Member will uncover. In short, how to behave at prayers, and what to do with his hat, form between them the ABC of the parliamentary scholar.”

To increase their appearance during debates and to be seen more easily, a Member wishing to raise a point of order during a division was, until 1998, required to speak with his hat on. Collapsible top hats were kept for the purpose. This requirement was abolished following recommendations from the Modernisation Select Committee, which stated: “At present, if a Member seeks to raise a point of order during a division, he or she must speak ‘seated and covered’. In practice this means that opera hats which is kept at each end of the Chamber has to be produced and passed to the Member concerned. This inevitably takes some time, during which the Member frequently seeks to use some other form of covering such as an Order Paper. This particular practice has almost certainly brought the House into greater ridicule than almost any other, particularly since the advent of television. We do not believe that it can be allowed to continue.”

The Committee also recommended that Members raising such a point of order should do so by standing in the normal way but from a position on the second bench as close to the Chair as possible, so they could be heard by both the Speaker and the Official Report. Male MPs may still not address the House whilst wearing a hat; women Members are exempt from this rule, through the different rules in society generally relating to female hat-wearing may well have caused a few problems when women first sat in the House in the 1920s.

Although it was at one time common for Members to wear swords in the Chamber (there is a record of an incident in the eighteenth century when one Member’s sword implied and removed another’s wig), it is not now permitted to carry arms of any kind into debate. The Sergeant-at-Arms, however, now wear a sword in the Chamber. Medals are not worn in the House Chamber. It is also a case that a law made in the fourteenth century prevents the wearing of armour in the House of Commons. The law which is still in force dates from 30 October 1313 under Edward I’s reign.

The Indian Parliament context

On achieving the Independence of India, while many of the same ceremonial sartorial practices continued in the Parliament of India, associated with the Office of Speaker and the Table of the House, were adopted and adapted to the Indian ethos, not all ceremonies which originate from the British period were adopted. Practices such as the wearing of the robe and wig by the Speaker and wearing of robes by the Clerk of the House is still in force in the Indian Parliament, and as a result of this, women being allowed to sit in the House of Commons.

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A conscious view was taken in the Indian Parliament, while many of the same ceremonial sartorial practices continued, of the wearing of armour in the Central Legislative Assembly, which is still in force dates from 30 October 1313 under Edward I’s reign. A conscious view was taken in the Indian Parliament, while many of the same ceremonial sartorial practices continued, that in a country which was predominantly agrarian, grappling with poverty and social issues as a secular nation, the Parliament of India needed to connect and represent the ordinary citizens of the country. Hence, the practices such as the wearing of wigs, robes, reading of prayers in the House were given up. Nevertheless, there is a dress code for the Secretary-General of the Lok Sabha and other Officers at the Table and parliamentary reporters. They have to wear buttoned up coats/tunics/adarkhon and matching trousers, which is the traditional Indian dress (suitable Indian traditional wear for lady officers). Similarly, there is a dress code for Marshals and Chamberry Attendants, but their attire is Indian in design.

The Parliamentarian | 2020: Issue Three | 100 years of publishing 1920-2020

258

259
Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) reaffirms its core priority of promoting gender equality in Parliaments as it releases new three-year strategic plan

The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network has officially published the CWP Strategic Plan 2020-2022 which sets out its core priority to encourage women in Parliaments and Commonwealth Parliaments to advance issues around gender equality and to advocate for greater representation of women in Parliaments across the Commonwealth.

With over 3,000 women Parliamentarians represented in 180 national, sub-national, provincial and territorial Parliaments of the Commonwealth, the CWP provides a means of building the capacity of women elected to Parliament to be more effective in their roles, improving the awareness and ability of all Parliamentarians, male and female, and encouraging them to include a gender perspective in all aspects of their role – legislation, oversight and representation - helping Parliaments to become gender-sensitive institutions. The CWP Chairperson, Hon. Sandanda Khanal, MNA (Pakistan) said: “I encourage all women Parliamentarians across the CWP’s membership, Branches and Regions of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to actively utilize and take ownership of this new Strategic Plan 2020-2022. Its success will be determined by our collective dedication to its implementation. I look forward to working with every member of the CWP to successfully fulfill this Plan.”

With the intention of progressing the work accomplished in the implementation of the network’s previous Strategic Plan 2017-2019, initiated by the CWP’s preceding Chairperson, Hon. Dr. Dato’ Noraini Ahmad MP (Malaysia), this CWP Strategic Plan 2020-2022 further refines the network’s focus by streamlining its outputs and priorities. Developed following a series of consultations with members of the CWP International Steering Committee, as well as other women Parliamentarians and Parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth, this new strategy will focus on addressing the following areas and key priorities: Women and leadership; Elimination of gender-based violence (GBV) in all its forms and harmful practices; Economic empowerment of women and; Equal access to national resources.

The CWA Secretary-General, Mr. Stephen Twigg welcomed the launch of the CWP Strategic Plan 2020-2022 and stated: “Women play a central role in advancing parliamentary democracy across the Commonwealth. Sustain Goal 5 on gender equality is of critical importance to the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians’ network. We will play an increasingly important role in connecting, developing and supporting women Parliamentarians across the Commonwealth.”

Women from Pakistan, Western Australia and UK highlight ‘shadow pandemic’ of domestic abuse

A new CPA UK podcast has highlighted the ‘shadow pandemic’ of domestic abuse and the increased incidents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Four Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians held a wide-ranging discussion on the increase in domestic abuse during enforced ‘lockdown’ measures due to COVID-19. Rt Hon. Maria Miller, MP (United Kingdom) highlighted that ‘lockdown’ measures across the world has confined families together in a household and has forced victims and perpetrators together whilst cutting off access to family and friends. Rt Hon. Rubina Jamil, MNA (Pakistan) spoke about the increasing number of domestic abuse cases in Pakistan and the campaign launched by the Ministry of Human Rights to increase the public awareness of domestic abuse and to create a national helpline, including an emergency WhatsApp number making “lockdown” measures across the world has confined families together in a household and has forced victims and perpetrators together whilst cutting off access to family and friends.

Former CWP Chairperson, Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda chaired a session on ‘women of the world’. Rt Hon. Laura Tucker-Longworth, MP, Speaker of House of Representatives of Belize; Hon. Donatelle Mukabali, Speaker of Chamber of Deputies of Rwanda; Hon. Thandi R. Modise, Speaker of National Assembly of South Africa; Hon. Bridget Annette-Georgina Chisholm, Speaker of House of Representatives of Trinidad & Tobago; and Hon. Christine Kangaliso, President of Senate of Trinidad & Tobago. The virtual global summit provided women in the highest decision-making positions of Parliaments with a unique forum and opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences which are of interest to their national and international agendas.

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians have attended the virtual 23rd Global Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians have attended the virtual 23rd Global Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament on 17-18 August 2020. New Zealand Commonwealth Parliamentarians held a wide-ranging discussion on the increase in domestic abuse during enforced ‘lockdown’ measures due to COVID-19. Rt Hon. Maria Miller, MP (United Kingdom) highlighted that ‘lockdown’ measures across the world has confined families together in a household and has forced victims and perpetrators together whilst cutting off access to family and friends. Rt Hon. Rubina Jamil, MNA (Pakistan) spoke about the increasing number of domestic abuse cases in Pakistan and the campaign launched by the Ministry of Human Rights to increase the public awareness of domestic abuse and to create a national helpline, including an emergency WhatsApp number making “lockdown” measures across the world has confined families together in a household and has forced victims and perpetrators together whilst cutting off access to family and friends.

Former CWP Chairperson, Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda chaired a session on ‘women of the world’. Rt Hon. Laura Tucker-Longworth, MP, Speaker of House of Representatives of Belize; Hon. Donatelle Mukabali, Speaker of Chamber of Deputies of Rwanda; Hon. Thandi R. Modise, Speaker of National Assembly of South Africa; Hon. Bridget Annette-Georgina Chisholm, Speaker of House of Representatives of Trinidad & Tobago; and Hon. Christine Kangaliso, President of Senate of Trinidad & Tobago. The virtual global summit provided women in the highest decision-making positions of Parliaments with a unique forum and opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences which are of interest to their national and international agendas.

CWP New Zealand support new sculpture project to commemorate women MPs and their bi-cultural journey to Parliament

The Wellington Sculpture Trust, working with the Speaker of the New Zealand Parliament, Rt Hon. Trevor Mallard, MP, will commission a sculpture to celebrate the journey that the women of New Zealand have made to become Members of Parliament. The Speaker of the New Zealand Parliament said: “I am pleased to see this work be commissioned, and it will mark the contribution made to the New Zealand Parliament by many women throughout the years.”

The project has been supported by the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) New Zealand. Deputy Speaker of the New Zealand Parliament, Rt Hon. Anne Tolley said: “The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians believed that this was an important story to be told within the grounds of Parliament and, more particularly, as we near the 130th anniversary of the franchise for women in New Zealand. We approached the Wellington Sculpture Trust to see if they would undertake the commissioning of this important work because of their extensive experience in delivering public works of art in Wellington and the excellence and rigour of their processes.”

Sue Elliott, Chair of the Wellington Sculpture Trust noted that: “This work is not to celebrate one woman, but the journey of many women who fought for the right for women to vote. They did this through incredible hard work and personal sacrifice, as did the inspirational women who first stood for Parliament against the odds.” She added that the brief provided to selected artists will ask them to address the narrative of the over 150 women who have become Members of Parliament and all the women whose shoulders they stood on to get there. The artwork will celebrate these women, serve as a learning tool for locals and tourists alike and add balance to the two statues within Parliament grounds which both commemorate former male Prime Ministers.

The sculpture will also celebrate the bi-cultural nature of the campaign for women’s representation in Parliament with prominent Māori women’s rights activists being featured. It is hoped the work will be installed prior to the 130th anniversary of New Zealand becoming the first place in the world to give women the vote in 2023.

For more images of CWP activities and events please visit www.cpahq.org/cpahq/flickr.
Amendment in Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act

On 17 March 2020, the Lok Sabha passed the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020. The Bill sought to amend the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 with a view to increase upper gestational limit for the termination of pregnancy, and also to strengthen access to comprehensive abortion care under strict conditions without compromising service and quality of safe abortion.

There is provision in the Bill providing for the opinion of one registered medical practitioner for the termination of a pregnancy up to 20 weeks of gestation; the requirement of the opinion of two registered medical practitioners for the termination of a pregnancy for 20 to 24 weeks of gestation; enhancing the upper gestation limit from 20 to 24 weeks for such category of women as may be prescribed by rules in this behalf; non-applicability of provisions relating to the length of pregnancy in cases where the termination of pregnancy is necessitated by the diagnosis of any substantial foetal abnormalities diagnosed by a Medical Board; and strengthening of the protection of privacy of a woman whose pregnancy has been terminated.

The Bill sought to expand the grounds for abortion, including major foetal abnormalities, non-applicability of grounds of sexual violence, etc. Ultrasounds must be set up particularly in cases where young girls have been raped and exposed to violence, etc. Ultrasounds should be mandatory for all pregnant women as it can detect major anomalies as early as 14 to 16 weeks. She suggested having two specialist gynaecologists for their opinion instead of two registered medical practitioners, where abortion is taken up to 24 weeks.

The Bill is really progressive to enhance the gestation limit for terminating pregnancies. Besides, there are several writ petitions in Courts, seeking permissions for the abortion of pregnancies at a gestational age beyond the present permissible limit on the grounds of foetal abnormalities or pregnancies due to sexual violence forced on women. This is a very progressive legislation and is based on wide consultation with stakeholders. The Bill might face some challenges in terms of implementation, but it seeks to achieve its objectives.

The Bill requested the Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Dr Harsh Vardhan, to bring in the Bill in the Rajya Sabha on 22 April 2020. Vardhan said that the Bill was brought in 1971, India was amongst the first few countries in the world to legalise abortion in order to provide legal and safe abortion services to women who required to terminate a pregnancy due to certain therapeutic or humanitarian grounds. The advancement in medical technology for safe abortions is also a reason for increasing upper gestational limit for terminating pregnancies. Besides, there are several writ petitions in Courts, seeking permissions for the abortion of pregnancies at a gestational age beyond the present permissible limit on the grounds of foetal abnormalities or pregnancies due to sexual violence forced on women. This is a very progressive legislation and is based on wide consultation with stakeholders. The Bill might seek to achieve its objectives.

Medical Board shall consist of a gynaecologist, a paediatrician, a radiologist or sonologist and such other number of members as may be notified by the State Government or Union territory. The Bill sought to extend the pregnancy termination period from 20 to 24 weeks in eligible cases with help of cases of congenital anomaly, lunar pregnancy, cases of rape, unwed, widow pregnancies and curtail illegal terminations carried out by ‘quacks’ and the consequent loss of precious lives. She suggested constituting an all-women board to rule on eligibility.

Dr Gautham Sigamani Pon (DMK) said enhancing the pregnancy termination period from 20 to 24 weeks in eligible cases will help with cases of congenital anomaly, lunar pregnancy, cases of rape, unwed, widow pregnancies and curtail illegal terminations carried out by ‘quacks’ and the consequent loss of precious lives. She suggested constituting an all-women board to rule on eligibility.

Dr Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar (AICT) believed safe abortion is essential to reduce maternal death. Fast Track Courts must be set up particularly in cases where young girls have been raped and exposed to violence, etc. Ultrasounds should be mandatory for all pregnant women as it can detect major anomalies as early as 14 to 16 weeks.

She suggested having two specialist gynaecologists for their opinion instead of two registered medical practitioners, where abortion is taken up to 24 weeks.

Kumari Goddeti Madhavi (YSR Congress) supporting the Bill requested the Minister to ensure that all norms and standardised protocols in clinical practice are followed throughout the country and to see that there is no proliferation of unregulated practitioners operating in this area. She noted that the Bill had been brought and was pending for the last 25 years. The Bill is awaited by women who need to terminate their pregnancy, especially those in rural areas, who are unable to access quality abortion services.

With thanks to our Parliamentary Report and Third Reading contributors: Prash Ramoutar (Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago); Stephen Boyd (Federal Parliament of Australia); Dr Jayadev Sahu (Parliament of India); Gabrielle de Billy Brown (Federal Parliament of Canada); Luke Harris (Parliament of New Zealand); Ravinder Grewal (Parliament of India); and Michael Berry (Parliament of the United Kingdom).
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of sex determination centres and female infanticide. Shri Chandeshwar Prasad (JD-U) said there is provision for setting up of a commission for sex determination test and for the protection of the privacy of a woman by not revealing the name of a woman whose pregnancy has been terminated. Describing the Bill as a step towards the safety and welfare of women, he requested that compensation be provided to the female members of the pregnant woman in the event of any death due to abortion.

Dr Amol Ramsing Kolhe (NCP) congratulating the government on getting several things right in the amendment Bill, 2020, recommended the inclusion of a provision in the Medical Board to take care of the psychological trauma of the female and to increase the number of social workers and counsellors at the lower level of the delivery system.

Shri Ritesh Pandey (BJP) welcomed the Bill and said criminalising abortion is an infringement of a woman’s reproductive rights and abortion needs to be decriminalised and access to safe abortion under the norms should be made available. He believed the amendment will decriminalise abortion and forces women to seek unsafe abortion and the male children will be carried out at unregistered abortion clinics.

Centre to develop modern training packages for the Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA), to enable them to provide the required information to women at the community level. Adv Dean Kuriakose (INC) was of the view that permitting abortion to abort a life still in the womb amounts to violation of the Constitution. Shri Pratik Bhakth Shrid (Shiv Sena) said the proposed changes would give much needed relief to rural women as they do not have access to safe abortions and also to victims of rape as they resort to unsafe abortion practices to maintain secrecy.

Shri Kotha Prabhakar (TRS) said the proposed Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill is the need of the hour and it is a welcome measure. Steps may be taken to increase the number of healthcare facilities and confidentiality of women who need to terminate pregnancy with the access of safe and legal abortion services and comprehensive abortion care. As a precautionary measure, the opinion of at least two doctors for the termination of pregnancy up to 20 weeks may be considered. Proper awareness may be created about the Bill and its implementation in society through television, newspapers and other means of media.

Shri P. Ravendaran Kumar (AIADMK) requested that the Minister to take the necessary action to increase the number of gynaecologists, paediatricians and radiologists, especially in community health centres, besides increasing the number of seats in medical colleges to meet the shortfall of doctors. Smt. Jaskaur Meena (BJP) supported the Amendment Bill as it would help keep check on the number of women dying due to unsafe abortions in the country. It will ensure the privacy, dignity, autonomy and confidentiality of women who need to terminate a pregnancy.

Shri Kalidhan Veerasawamy (DMK) lauded the government for bringing progressive and revolutionary amendments in this Bill. He was concerned about the safety of Doctors who provide this care and who are duty bound to report sexual abuse of children under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.

Shri Nihal Chand Chouhan (BJP) requested the government improve the quality of drinking water as chemical and pesticide laden drinking water also affects the health of mother and the child.

Dr Thirum Ramavelan (VCK) urged for further simplifying the procedures followed for the medical termination of pregnancy. Shri Ravi Kishan (BJP) termed the Bill as a milestone in regard to empowerment of women. The Minister, Dr Harsh Vardhan in his reply made it clear that only in cases where women believe that the continued pregnancy be due to certain unfortunate circumstances or their child is likely to remain handicapped for the life, as been extended to 20 weeks from 24 weeks. He assured that sufficient checks and balances have been put in place even for such cases. In order to ensure the safety of these late term abortions, a group of experts is needed to give an opinion on the procedure and safety of procedures on a case to case basis. Maternity homes are, therefore, necessary for late term abortions. Although, the decision of termination of pregnancy should be with the women only, the safety and wellbeing of women has been taken into account along with the rights of women.

Guidelines for Committee Meetings in view of COVID-19

The nationwide lockdown on 24 March 2020 to fight the pandemic COVID-19 interrupted the holding of Parliamentary Committee meetings. Committees were not able to meet till the first week of July 2020. There were demand from some law-makers for holding virtual Committee meetings. But as there is no such provision in the rules, meetings of Committees could not take place.

With further relaxation made in lockdown provisions with effect from 1 July 2020, Parliamentary Committees have started meeting while observing certain measures. The number of officials from the Ministry and Department of Government of India appearing for evidence is restricted to six. Audio recordings of the proceedings are made available to the Verbatim Reporting Service Branch for transcription and the officers of this Service are not physically present inside the Committee rooms. Seating arrangement in the Committee Room is made strictly according to the norm of six feet of social distancing. No printed material is used for the purpose of meetings and all documents for Members are now sent in soft form. The Government Departments appearing for evidence have been advised not to bring any material or bags for Members.

The Committee Branches are also restricting the number of their officials and supporting staff in Committee rooms.

The Arms (Amendment) Bill 2019

The Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha by Shri Feroze Varun Gandhi, Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha), on 10 June 2019. The Bill was referred to the Standing Committee on Home Affairs on 30 June 2019. The Committee reported its recommendations to the Lok Sabha on 23 September 2019. The Bill was again referred to the Standing Committee on Home Affairs where it was reported to the Lok Sabha on 23 January 2020. The Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha on 29 April 2020. The Bill was taken up for discussion in the Rajya Sabha on 9 July 2020. The bill was later referred to the Standing Committee on Home Affairs on 8 July 2020. The Bill was referred to the Standing Committee on Home Affairs. The Bill was passed by the Standing Committee on Home Affairs on 30 September 2020. The Bill was passed by both houses of Parliament by 10th August 2020. The Bill was sent to the President for assent on 13 August 2020. The President gave assent to the Bill on 18 August 2020.

The Arms (Amendment) Bill, 2019, was brought to consolidate and amend the law relating to arms and ammunitions. The Arms Act, 1959 and 59 years after its commencement, the remaining provisions with the officer in charge of the nearest police station or, subject to the conditions prescribed, with a licensed dealer or, when such person is a member of the armed forces of the Union, in a unitary formation in that sub-section after which it shall be handed over within ninety days from the date of expiry of the period or at the time of change of station. Further that stipulation being while granting arms licence on inheritance or hormonal basis, the limit of two firearms should not be exceeded.

Debate

There have been intense debates on this Amending Bill by Members in both Houses of Parliament. The key points during deliberations of this amending legislation was:

Paragraph 3 of the Arms Act. However, the Bill prohibits the possession of illegal firearms and ammunition and prohibition for continuation of the provisions of the Act, in order to curb illegal weapons and violence stemming from them. The law enforcement agencies indicate growing instances of illegal arms and ammunition, and punishment for contravention of the provisions of the Act, in order to curb illegal weapons and violence stemming from them.

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The Bill was a laudable initiative. The World Bank had acknowledged India to be a bright spot among developing and emerging economies and on its liberalization, it can achieve more. There indeed is a need to develop an International Financial Services Centre for the expansion of global economy and strategic advantage. Setting up a new authority will do away with all the regulators. It would help in sustaining the local economy and it would also be able to do away with redundant services, asset management, wealth management, global tax management, global and regional corporation management, risk management operations, antimerger and acquisition activities.

At the end, the Minister stated points/queries raised during the debate. The Bill was passed by Lok Sabha on 11 December 2019 and by Rajya Sabha on 12 December 2019. The Bill, as passed by both Houses of Parliament was assented to by the President of India on 19 December 2019.

Hence, they are forced to reply for citizenship by naturalisation under section 6 of the said Act, which, inter alia, prescribe twelve years residency as a qualification for naturalisation from the date of their entry into India, as their date of entry into India, if they fulfill conditions for Indian citizenship specified in section 5 or the qualification for the naturalisation under the provisions of the Third Schedule to the Act.

Many persons of Indian origin including persons belonging to the said minority communities from specified areas have been applying for citizenship under Section 5 of the Citizenship Act, 1955 but they are unable to produce proof of their Indian origin. Further, there was no specific provision in Section 70 of the parent Act to cancel the registration of Overseas Citizen of India Cardholders who violated any provisions of the parent Act or any other law for the time being in force.

The Government accordingly brought forward the Amending Bill to address the aforementioned issues and to protect the national interest. The Government has observed that illegal immigrants from the indigenous populations of North-Eastern States covered under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution and the statutory protection given to them under the Sixth Schedule to the Act.

The Central Government exempted the said migrants from the adverse penal consequences of the Pakistan Entry into India Act, 1949 and the Foreigners Act, 1946 and rules or orders made thereunder vide various notifications, dated 7 September 2016 and 18 July 2016. Subsequently, the Central Government made them eligible for long term visa to stay in India, vide, orders dated 8 January 2016 and 14 September 2016. Now, it is proposed to make the said migrants eligible for Indian citizenship. A considered view was taken that the illegal migrants who had entered into India up to the cut-off date of 31 December 2014, need a separate legislation for the recognition of citizenship in respect of such matters. For this purpose, the Central Government or an authority specified by it, shall grant the certificate of registration or certificate of naturalisation, subject to such conditions, restrictions and manner as may be prescribed. Since many of them have entered into India long back, they may be given the choice of becoming Indian citizens, as per their date of entry into India, in the best way possible.

Further, there were no specific provisions in Section 70 of the parent Act to cancel the registration of Overseas Citizen of India Cardholders, who reached India without valid travel documents or if the valid documents have expired or they had incomplete or no documents.

Under the existing provisions of the Act, the Central Government brought forward the Centres Authority Bill, 2019. The Bill as passed by both Houses of Parliament was assented to by the President of India on 12 December 2019. The International Financial Services Centres Authority Bill, 2019

Key features of the Bill:
- Under the amendment made to the establishment of the International Financial Services Centres Authority (the Authority) to develop and regulate the financial services provided through such a Centre.
- It has been stipulated that the powers and functions of the financial sector regulator under Section 5 of the Act shall be exercised and performed by the Authority in so far as they related to the regulation of financial products, financial services and financial institutions in the International Financial Services Centres.
- Further provided that every transaction in the International Financial Services Centre in India has been set up at GIFT City in Gujarat.

As at present, the banking, capital markets and insurance sectors in International Financial Services Centres are regulated by multiple regulators. The Bill provides that the International Financial Services Centres shall be set up and operate in an International Financial Centre. The Bill in its present form will enhance access to global financial markets.

Debate

The debate started at length in both Houses of Parliament. The Minister in-charge while piloting the Bill, at the outset stated that around 2008, a Committee appointed by the Ministry of Finance had looked into the entire issue of Financial Services and even at that time (in 2008) it was felt that by 2015 up to US$50 billion dollars would be spent on International Finance Services by Indian companies and that amount would obviously be going outside of the country because India did not have an internationalised financial centre. The Bill was a laudable initiative. The World Bank had acknowledged India to be a bright spot among developing and emerging economies and on its liberalization, it can achieve more.

There indeed is a need to develop an International Financial Services Centre for the expansion of global economy and strategic advantage. Setting up a new authority will do away with all the regulators. It would help in sustaining the local economy and it would also be able to do away with redundant services, asset management, wealth management, global tax management, global and regional corporation management, risk management operations, antimerger and acquisition activities.

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THIRD READING: INDIA

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Parliamentary Sittings
Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic has remained the focus of the work of the Parliament of Canada over the last months. Since May 2020, both the Senate of Canada and the House of Commons have been recalled twice by their respective Speaker for extraordinary sittings in order to debate government Bills related to the response to the pandemic. Following an additional extension of its adjournment period, the Senate of Canada resumed its regular sittings on 16 June 2020 for the first time since 13 March 2020 with approximately 30 Senators present in person. No virtual or hybrid system is in use in the Senate’s proceedings. Pending another recall from the Speaker, the Senate stands adjourned until the autumn session.

As indicated in the previous issue of The Parliamentarian, in the House of Commons, a motion adopted on 20 April 2020 set up the new parameters under which MPs would meet in a special Committee chaired by the Speaker. A new motion adopted on 26 May 2020 set up the schedule for the summer: five sittings between 17 June and 26 August 2020, after which the House will stand adjourned until 21 September 2020. These meetings are hybrid: a small number of MPs can attend in person, while others are welcome to participate virtually. At this time, only Members who are present in person are able to vote.

Parliamentary Committees
The Standing Senate Committee on National Finance and the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology both released interim reports related to their study of the federal government’s response to the pandemic. National Finance called for Parliament to regain its power to analyze and approve government spending, as emergency measures have granted the government exceptional power and exemption from parliamentary scrutiny. For its part, Social Affairs, Science and Technology highlighted the fact that seniors and front-line healthcare workers are particularly vulnerable to the pandemic.

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs has released two reports on how Parliament could react to the pandemic. In the first, it made a series of recommendations regarding the way Parliamentarians could continue to play their role while considering sanitary, judicial, procedural, technological and practical concerns raised by witnesses. It also identified an increased risk of injuries for parliamentary interpreters because of the move to virtual meetings due to poor audio quality and inadequate equipment.

The second report makes recommendations regarding the creation of an online voting system in order to permit full participation of all Members, whether in person or remotely. These temporary measures should be fully tested and approved by all recognised parties before implementation.

Changes in Party Leadership
Two in-person candidates’ debates in the leadership race for the Conservative Party of Canada were organised between the four candidates: Leslyn Lewis, Hon. Peter MacKay, Erin O’Toole, MP, and Derek Sloan, MP. Held in person, the first debate was in French and the second in English. In addition, two virtual debates have been organised so far. As of 17 July 2020, nine candidates are in the race to find a successor to Elizabeth May, MP as leader of the Green Party of Canada. At this time, three candidates’ debates have occurred. The next leader will be chosen via an online ballot with a mail-in option for those unable to vote online. The winner will be announced on 3 October 2020 during the Green Party’s national convention in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island.

Changes in the Senate
On 8 May 2020, Hon. Patricia Bovey announced that she was leaving the Independent Senators Group (ISG) to join the Progressive Senate Group (PSG). Hon. Peter Harder, the former Government Representative in the Senate who stood as non-affiliated, joined the PSG on 14 May. Hon. Pierre Dallaire also changed affiliations from ISG to PSG on 21 May. With these new members, the PSG reached the minimum number required to be a recognised group in the Senate. On 8 July, Hon. Wanda Thomas Bernard also joined the PSG.

Leadership responsibilities in the PSG have been assigned as follows: Hon. Jane Cordy has been appointed Leader and Hon. Dennis Dawson is Deputy Leader of the PSG. Hon. Patricia Bovey has been named Liaison of the PSG and Hon. Terry Mercer has been appointed Caucus Chair. As of 17 July 2020, the standings in the Senate were: Independent Senators Group 13, Progressive Senate Group 10, non-affiliated 5 and vacant 9.

Legislation
Five Bills related to the COVID-19 response have received Royal Assent. They created three new support programmes: the CanGo Emergency Wage Subsidy, the CanGo Emergency Response Benefit and the CanGo Emergency Student Benefit. The Bills also introduced changes to new and existing acts to address “the need for flexibility in relation to certain time limits and other periods” which have been affected by COVID-19.

On 22 July 2020, a Federal Court decision ruled that the Safe Third Country Agreement was unconstitutional and gave the Parliament of Canada six months to respond. The agreement requires asylum seekers who attempt to enter Canada via the United States of America to first seek asylum in that country.

Ethics
On 25 June 2020, the federal government announced a new programme, the CanGo Student Service Grant, which would encourage students to volunteer in their communities and receive a one-time payment for their effort. This programme would be administered by WE Charity, an international organisation focusing on youth empowerment and development. Following revelations that the charity had multiple ties to persons associated with the Liberal Party of Canada and their family, the contract was rescinded.

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance and the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics have held meetings to study the situation. In addition, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, Mario Dion, has confirmed that he is also investigating the alleged contraventions of the Conflict of Interest Act.

Addressing Systemic Discrimination
On 16 June 2020, the Parliamentary Black Caucus, composed of Black Parliamentarians and allies, released calls for action to address systemic racism. The proposals are aimed at all levels of government in areas such as data collection, justice and public safety reforms and arts and culture.

On 23 June 2020, as a result of a request from four of its Members, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security undertook a new study on “systemic racism in policing in Canada.”

Leaders’ Debates Commission
The Leaders’ Debates Commission, created in the lead-up to the 2019 federal election, published a report on its work during that period. Its principal recommendation is to establish a “permanent, publicly-funded entity to organize leaders’ debates.” It also recommends that the Commissioner be appointed after consultation with the registered political parties in the House of Commons.

Nominations
On 31 March 2020, Hon. Ralph Goodale, former MP, was named as special advisor for the response to the Ukrainian International Airlines tragedy of 6 January 2020, which resulted in the death of 153 Canadian citizens and 30 permanent residents.

On 6 July 2020, Hon. Bob Rae, former MP, was named as the new Canadian ambassador to the United Nations. On 8 June 2020, Karen Hogan began her role as the new Auditor General of Canada. She is the second woman to be named Auditor General since the creation of the position. She replaced Sylvain Ricard, who had been interim Auditor General since March 2019.

Emergency Student Benefit
Emergency Wage Subsidy
Finance
Legal Affairs
Parliamentary Procedures
Public Service
Public Scrutiny
Security
Systemic Discrimination
Trade
Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner
COVID-19
DURING COVID-19 SCRUTINY OF AUSTRALIAN EXECUTIVE GOVERNMENT CONTINUES IN PARLIAMENT

In March 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 outbreak, lockdown provisions and social distancing were implemented. The sitting pattern of the Australian Federal Parliament was also affected with Parliament not scheduled to meet until August. Fortunately, this was revised, and the Parliament sat for a total of three weeks during May and June 2020. This ensured that the government could introduce essential legislation relating to the COVID-19 response. At the same time, the additional sittings also provided for the Parliament to scrutinise and hold the Executive to account. In addition, this important function was also performed by the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19. The purpose of the Senate COVID-19 Committee is to scrutinise the Executive while it delivers some of the largest emergency programs in Australia’s history. The Senate is non-government controlled and was able to establish the Committee and, in particular, ensure that an Opposition Senator, would be the Chair. Subsequently, Senator Hon. Katy Gallagher (Labor), was elected as Chair of the Committee.

Senate Committees have an important role to play in providing oversight and accountability of the Australian government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This Committee is to scrutinise all aspects of the Australian government’s response to the pandemic. The Committee will begin its work on 1 August 2020.

The Committee’s terms of reference include: to provide accountability, transparency and scrutiny of the Australian government’s response to the pandemic for the Australian people.

At the first hearing of the Committee, Senator Gallagher stated that ‘the economic impact of the health response has been devastating for millions of Australians and is still unfolding. The government’s and Reserve Bank’s economic response to the pandemic and its effects has to date totalled more than AUS$300 billion. It is against this background that the Committee will begin its work.’ Senator Gallagher explained the role of the Committee commenting that the Senate Select Committee is the strongest way to provide oversight, in the absence of the House and Senate sitting themselves.

At the first hearing of the Committee, Senator Gallagher stated that ‘the economic impact of the health response has been devastating for millions of Australians’.
On 26 April 2020, the Australian Government launched the voluntary Coronavirus app, COVIDSafe. People can download the app to their mobile phones which then operate in the background. As a person comes into contact with another person with the app, the phones connect via Bluetooth and the apps record the interaction. If one person is later diagnosed with the Coronavirus, the people they came into contact with via the app can be advised by health officials that they should be tested. The Minister for Government Services, Hon. Stuart Robert, MP, explained that when two users with the app come into contact with one another it then securely makes a ‘digital handshake’, which notes the date and time, distance and duration of the contact. All information collected by the app is securely encrypted and stored in the app on the user’s phone. No-one, not even the user, can access it. Unless and until a person is diagnosed with COVID-19, no contact information collected in the app is discussed or able to be accessed. Then, once the person accesses and uploads the data, only the relevant state or territory public health officials will have access to the information. The app information can only be accessed if a user tests positive. The app then securely makes a ‘digital handshake’, which notes the date and time, distance and duration of the contact. If one person is later diagnosed with the Coronavirus, the people they came into contact with via the app can be advised by health officials that they should be tested. The Privacy Amendment (Public Health Contact Information) Act 2020 introduced the COVIDSafe app. The Attorney-General, Hon. Christian Porter, MP, stated that on release, COVIDSafe was supported by interim privacy protections contained in the Minister for Health’s determination under the Biosecurity Act 2015. Building on this, the purpose of this Bill is to enshrine the privacy protections in the determination in primary legislation.

Senator Murray Watt (Labor) confirmed that the government supported the contact tracing app but noted that the government had not achieved its uptake targets for the app. Senator Watt stated that ‘the Prime Minister has confirmed that 40% of the Australian population need to download the app for it to be an effective public health tool. That means about 10 million Australians. The government is well short of that figure at the moment. About 5.6 million Australians have reportedly downloaded the COVIDSafe app. Now the Prime Minister appears to be walking away from his target of 10 million COVIDSafe downloads. He now claims that we only need 40% of all smartphone users in Australia to download the app. But that target is not based on science; it’s based on politics. The truth is that many experts believe that the Prime Minister’s original 40% target falls well short of what is needed.’

Senator Peter McKim (One Nation) advised that One Nation would support the legislation, but he would not be downloading the app because ‘the app is not up to scratch’. Senator Roberts raised a number of security and privacy issues noting that data stored all COVIDSafe data held in the National COVIDSafe Data Store to be retained at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic; protect against decryption of COVIDSafe data stored on users’ devices, provide that no-one can be forced to download or use COVIDSafe or upload data to the National COVIDSafe Data Store; and finally, the determination created criminal offences for the breach of the above requirements, with a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment.

The Privacy Amendment (Public Health Contact Information) Act 2020 amends the Biosecurity Act 2015 and introduces new privacy protections in the determination in primary legislation.

While the Greens supported the legislation, Senator McKim advised that he ‘won’t be downloading this app, because I simply don’t trust the government with data about who I am proximity to. I wish the government had gone down a different route, one that many other governments in the world have gone down, in which there is no centralised store of data. The data simply remains on people’s mobile devices and, should someone test positive for Coronavirus, a message is sent to people who that person was proximate to, letting them know that they’ve been proximate to someone who has tested positive, and therefore gives them the opportunity to decide to go and get tested themselves.’

Senator Malcolm Roberts (One Nation) advised that One Nation would support the legislation, but he would not be downloading the app because ‘the app is not up to scratch’. Senator Roberts raised a number of security and privacy issues noting that data stored to the cloud is not deleted. Senator Roberts stated that ‘if a cloud service is used to back up or sync a phone, the COVIDSafe app contact log gets backed up to the cloud. This can be viewed by anyone with a sign-in without the phone user’s knowledge. I acknowledge that this Bill makes the behaviour illegal, but not storing some of the data in plain English would have been a far better choice.’ Senator Roberts also claimed that if a person has named their phone then in some circumstances the name is what is stored.

Senator Roberts stated that ‘app users who have named their phones with their real name may be exposing themselves to danger. This results from the app using different ways of broadcasting data to maximise the chance of a match. This tells us that the developers have taken a deliberate decision to compromise safety to achieve the most number of matches’.
The Parliamentarian | 2020: Issue Three | 100 years of publishing 1920-2020

PARLIAMENTARY REPORTS FROM TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Trinidad and Tobago holds national elections in August

On Friday 3 July 2020, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Hon. Dr Keith Rowley, announced the dissolution of the 11th Parliament to take place on Monday 13 August 2020, ahead of a general election. This came three months after the 24th May date when he announced in the House of Representatives that the country would go to the polls on Monday 10 August 2020 to elect a new government. Some 1.5 million citizens are on the Voters’ List in Trinidad and Tobago, and the population is 1.4 million people, made up principally of two main ethnic groups, Africans and East Indians.

Hon. Dr Keith Rowley told the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago: “On this day July 3, I am to advise all my colleagues that I have advised Her Excellency the President of Trinidad and Tobago to dissolve Parliament at midnight. Nomination Day would be Friday 17 July, and Polling Day would be 10 August 2020.”

The outgoing Prime Minister concluded: “I wish all my colleagues a safe and happy, enjoyable productive campaign and I look forward to seeing all of them somewhere in Trinidad and Tobago, before the next Parliament.”

According to records of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, the dissolution of the 11th Parliament comes almost two months before the end of the term in September. The Election Date of 10 August 2020 is, however, three weeks before the end of the present term.

The ruling People’s National Movement (PNM) won the last elections on 7 September 2015, and the Trinidad and Tobago Parliament’s first sitting following the election was held on 23 September 2015. The previous People’s Partnership Government had called general elections to take place in September 2015, some three months after the 24th May date of its 2010 victory.

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago consists of the President of Trinidad and Tobago, the House of Representatives, which is composed of the Speaker in addition to 41 directly elected Members serving a five-year term in single-seat constituencies, and the Senate which has 31 Senators appointed by the President of Trinidad and Tobago, House of Representatives, and the House of Representatives who piloted the Bill, pointed out that the sharing of videos depicting domestic violence was unacceptable. “For the last few weeks, I have noticed an alarming trend on social media where instances of domestic violence are shared to serve as entertainment,” Ms Webster-Roy told Parliament that the Bill empowers the Commissioner of Police to establish and maintain a Domestic Violence Register.

Ms Webster-Roy said that since 2015, the sum of $701 million has been allocated to the Gender Affairs Division. “We have worked with various stakeholders to implement programmes geared towards changing the cultural norms and values that perpetrate family violence, and violence on the whole and worked with private and public sector organizations to address toxic masculinity which often leads to violence in our society,” the Minister added.

Opposition MP, Terrence Deyalsingh, in his contribution, said that alcohol is one of the triggers of physical and sexual violence. “Roughly one-third of women have experienced lifetime sexual violence. Seven per cent of all responses reported having sexual intercourse.”

The Minister said that the evidence is overwhelming of the role of alcohol in domestic violence and noted that jealousy has played a role in 21% of cases, adding that 21% alone is not the remedy. Eighteen per cent of women identified power and control while 27% of women identified no particular trigger.

“Society has taught men that sexual dominance should be portrayed, through violence,” Minister Deyalsingh said. He added that men control women by isolation and playing mind games and using children as a tool. “If you don’t stay with me and take the abuse, I will kill the children or take away the children if you leave, you will never see your children again... that plays to the mind games.”

Opposition MP, Ramona Ramdial noted that most women today are strong and independent, having embraced education. She called for serious parenting, but over the years in Trinidad and Tobago, there has been improvement, and called for opportunities to be made available to achieve economic empowerment. The MP from Couva North, Central Trinidad, said that in some cases of domestic violence, results show that they are not empowered to move away from abusive situations.

The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister, Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy who piloted the Bill, pointed out that the sharing of videos depicting domestic violence was unacceptable. “For the last few weeks, I have noticed an alarming trend on social media where instances of domestic violence are shared to serve as entertainment,” Ms Webster-Roy told Parliament that the Bill empowers the Commissioner of Police to establish and maintain a Domestic Violence Register.

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Opposition MP, Christine Newallo-Hosein, said it was important to look at the root causes of abuse in each instance which could be helped by counselling. “The only way we can change the minds of someone is to get them to understand there is a perceived behaviour that is not in tandem with what is required in the society, that they need help.” Ms Newallo-Hosein called on the government to make counselling mandatory.
Arms Legislation Bill

The Arms Legislation Bill passed its Third Reading on 19 June 2020. The Minister for Police, Hon. Stuart Nash, MP (Labour) explained to the House, “the new law is designed to stop firearms falling into the wrong hands. It spells out for the first time that owning a firearm is a privilege, limited to responsible, licensed owners. The most significant change is a new firearms register.”

However, the Opposition spokesperson for Police, National MP, Mr Brett Harden countered that the Bill “places a whole lot more compliance and cost on shooting clubs and ranges, almost all of which are simply run by small volunteer groups.” Mr Harden added, “now, National does not oppose a firearms registry per se, but what we've said all along is that this wasn't delivered the objective, which was stated as keeping the guns out of the hands of criminals.”

Ms Kiritapu Allan, MP (Labour) commented in particular on the passage of the legislation: “I think that's extraordinary that we're pushing a piece of legislation through the House and passing it in urgency, when we don't know the right of that Royal Commission.”

Mr Iain McKeith, MP (National) expressed concern that the new law is a threat to the fundamental right to bear arms. Mr McKeith added, “the legislative changes that we have made as a nation since March the 15th have meant the Christchurch terrorist, wouldn't have been able to purchase the type of weapons that killed 51 people last year.”

Hon. Dr Nick Smith, MP (National) disagreed, however, saying, “the question in the mind of all New Zealanders and of this Parliament… is how it was possible for that individual to be able to buy together the armaments of which he committed that horrific terrorist act. The part that concerns me about this Bill and all the rhetoric that has surrounded it is that that fundamental question has not been answered.”

The Bill passed with 63 votes to 50 and received the Royal Assent on 24 June 2020.

COVID-19 response legislation


The COVID-19 Response (Taxation and Other Regulatory Urgent Measures) Bill set out provisions to limit the risk of the outbreak or spread of COVID-19 by creating public health enforcement powers, offences, and penalties. The Minister of Health, Dr David Clark, MP (Labour) explained, “the scale of the epidemic means that we need a suite of response measures.”

The Overseas Investment (Urgent Measures) Amendment Bill was designed to improve New Zealand’s foreign investment screening regime in response to the pandemic. New Zealand First MP, Hon. Dr Nick Smith, MP (National) explained: “This Bill actually aims to protect our national interests, the long-term investments that we do put forward in our international investments, the oversight into the foreign investment in New Zealand, because much has changed in our COVID world.”

The Immigration Amendment (COVID-19 Measures) Amendment Bill implemented Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern’s announcement that she would take a 20% pay cut during the pandemic, along with Government Ministers and heads of Government departments. The Bill was supported by the Opposition, Hon. Nick Smith, MP (National) commented that ordinary New Zealanders “are taking huge economic pain in the wake of COVID-19, and for that reason it is appropriate that other Members of Parliament, share in that burden personally.”

The Associate Minister for the Environment, Hon. Eugenie Sage, MP (Green) explained: “the Green Party was concerned, as were many submitters, about some key issues: public health, enforcement powers, offences, and penalties. The Minister of Immigration, Hon. Iain Lees-Galloway, MP (Labour) explained, “the scale of the epidemic means that we need a suite of response measures.”

The Bill passed with 63 votes to 50 and received the Royal Assent on 24 June 2020.

Electoral (Registration of Sentenced Prisoners) Amendment Bill and Electoral (Registration of Sentenced Prisoners) Amendment Bill (No. 2)
The Electoral (Registration of Sentenced Prisoners) Amendment Bill passed its Third Reading during urgent business on 24 June 2020. The Bill makes changes to the Electoral Act 1953, reversing changes made by the previous Government through the Electoral (Amendment) (Registration of Sentenced Prisoners) Amendment Act 2020.

The Minister of Justice, Hon. Andrew Little, MP (Labour) explained, “this was the right thing to do for justice sentenced to less than three years, because of a very simple principle. At the time of an election, somebody served a sentence to less than three years, they will be out before the next election. It might be in a month, it might be in 6 months, but they will be out before the next election, and they must have a right to have a say on those running the country that they are about to be released into.”

During the Committee stage of the Electoral (Registration of Sentenced Prisoners) Amendment Bill last week, Mr Chris Penn, MP (National) countered, “in response to the point made… that the National Party believes in supporting those who have committed supporting one of those parts of the Green Party’s Order Paper and not the other, I would say that it’s consistent with our position throughout in relation to the underlying legislation that we oppose it, and that we do nothing to assist its passage through the House because we do not believe in it.”

The Electoral (Registration of Sentenced Prisoners) Amendment Bill (No. 2) received the Royal Assent on 1 July 2020.
Both UK Houses of Parliament continued to adapt to the COVID-19 outbreak in recent months. The UK House of Commons agreed to temporary motions to permit hybrid ‘substantive’ proceedings from 22 April 2020. It allowed for proceedings including stages of Public Bills to be carried out whilst adhering to social distancing measures. Up to approximately 50 Members of Parliament could physically attend the Chamber whilst others participated remotely via videoconferencing software.

The House of Commons also sanctioned an online remote divisions system on 22 April 2020. History was made on 12 May 2020 when remote voting was used for the first time. Members were given 15 minutes to cast their vote on the MemberHub website, after which votes were collated by the Public Bill Office and announced in the Chamber. A further nine divisions were held remotely before the House of Commons suspended for the Whitsun recess on 20 May 2020.

Motions to renew the temporary orders regarding remote voting and proceedings were not tabled before the recess. Responding to an Urgent Question on the matter, the Leader of the House of Commons, Rt Hon. Jacob Rees-Mogg, MP (Con), told the House “under the hybrid proceedings, the time this House is able to spend debating legislation faces being cut by around two thirds... if we persist with the present arrangements, it will become harder to make progress in a timely fashion.” For the new Prime Minister’s address to the nation on the 10 May 2020 and subsequent Government guidance (that advised those who were unable to work from home to return to their workplaces, if possible), Mr Rees-Mogg remarked “That is why, in line with Government advice... I am asking Members to return to their place of work after Whitsun.”

Rt Hon. Valerie Vaz, MP (Lab), Shadow Leader of the House of Commons, challenged Mr Rees-Mogg during the debate: “The Government’s own advice is that those who can work from home do so... that is still the Government’s advice, on grounds of working and travelling wisely. We will confirm that he is not contradicting Government advice...” The Speaker recalled the House of Commons a day early from the Whitsun recess to consider a new temporary procedural motion tabled by the Leader of the House on 2 June 2020. The motion rescinded the temporary orders for hybrid substantive proceedings, thereby ending the ability of Members to participate virtually. It also provided that divisions may be conducted under arrangements made by the Speaker, as long as Members participate from within the Parliamentary estate. An amendment was tabled by Rt Hon. Karen Bradley, MP (Con), Chair of the Procedure Committee, to amend the motion to allow for remote divisions and remote participation to continue unless the Speaker deems that physically participation is consistent with relevant public health guidance and advice and with the legal duties of the House of Commons Commission and the Corporate Officer, or until the House otherwise orders. As the temporary order sanctioning remote divisions had expired, the online division system could not be used to vote on the motion. A system was devised to allow for MPs to physically vote whilst meeting social distancing guidelines of two metres. The system was a queue that members although the Parliamentary estate as MPs took turns to enter the House of Commons Chamber and state aloud whether they were voting ‘aye’ or ‘no’. This was then recorded by Clerks watching the video feed. Karen Bradley’s amendment was defeated by 185 votes to 242, and the motion in the name of Jacob Rees-Mogg was carried by 261 votes to 163. Each division took over 40 minutes due to the socially-distanced method of voting.

However, further temporary orders were tabled by the Leader of the House on 4 June 2020 which permitted Members to participate virtually for some proceedings, namely Questions, Urgent Questions and Statements. Rt Hon. Karen Bradley, MP (Lab) noted that Members have self-certified that they are unable to attend Westminster for medical or public health reasons. These orders were agreed to by the House without debate. The numbers able to physically attend the Chamber remained capped to facilitate social distancing. A system has since been implemented for divisions in which Members scan their Parliament passes located in the division lobbies to register their vote whilst maintaining social distancing. During this period, certain Public Bill Committees were also trialled by the House authorities but have not been implemented.

The UK House of Lords also continued to adapt to the UK PARLIAMENT CONTINUES TO ADAPT TO COVID-19
UK PARLIAMENT CONTINUES TO ADAPT TO COVID-19

result of the pandemic. The Lords agreed to a Business of the House motion on 4 June 2020 which permitted a hybrid House model whereby Members could participate virtually or physically in the Chamber, albeit with limited capacity. This departed from the fully virtual model which the House of Lords had used since returning from the Easter recess. The House of Lords also developed and launched an online voting website, PeerHub, to facilitate remote voting. This was used for the first time on 15 June 2020 during the Third Reading of the Extradition (Provisional Arrest) Bill. 544 Members of the House of Lords took part in the second division on the Bill, making it the 13th biggest division to that date.

Coronavirus-related legislation
Continuing its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the UK Government introduced two expedited Bills to Parliament. The first was the Corporate Insolvency and Governance Bill which was introduced to the House of Commons on 20 May 2020. This Bill was introduced in response to the potential economic fallout following the lockdown measures imposed due to the pandemic. Provisions included greater flexibility to the insolvency regime so companies could explore options for rescue whilst suppliers are protected and the suspension of parts of insolvency law to facilitate trading without the threat of directors’ personal liability. Over 90 Government amendments were tabled and agreed to in the House of Lords. These included amendments to change statutory instruments under certain provisions from the negative to “made affirmative” procedure. Rt Hon. Earl Howe (Con), Deputy Leader of the House of Lords, said during the Report stage that the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee “have made important recommendations and the Government have sought to accept as many of them as possible.” The Bill received Royal Assent on 25 June 2020.

The Business and Planning Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 25 June 2020. The Bill includes a range of measures to help businesses adjust to new ways of working as the country recovers from disruption caused by COVID-19. These included relaxing rules to make it easier for premises in England serving food and drink to seat and serve customers outdoors, and amending legislation to facilitate ‘Bounce Back Loans’ (Government loans for small businesses impacted by COVID-19). 42 amendments were made to the Bill in the House of Lords and these were agreed to by the House of Commons. The Bill received Royal Assent on 22 July 2020.

Curtailment of recesses
In both UK Houses of Parliament, it was announced that the summer recess would be curtailed. The planned September recess held for party conferences was also scrapped as a result of the cancellation of the conferences following the COVID-19 outbreak. Rt Hon. Lord Ashton of Hyde (Con), Government Chief Whip, told the House that it was in response to the “inevitably slow progress of business over the past three months.”

This was in reference to the Government’s intentions to pass significant Bills including the Agriculture, Environment and Trade Bills before the end of the transition period following the UK’s withdrawal from the EU. The UK Government formally notified the EU on 12 June 2020 that it would not extend the transition period; the period in which the UK and EU may negotiate a future framework of their relationship before the UK ceases to be a member of the single market and customs union. The transition period ends on 31 December 2020.

Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme
On 23 June 2020, the Leader of the House of Commons, Rt Hon. Jacob Rees-Mogg, MP (Con), moved motions relating to the formation of an independent panel of experts to deal with bullying and harassment allegations; a recommendation in the independent inquiry report by Dame Laura Cox, QC, The Bullying and Harassment of House of Commons Staff.

Moving the motion, Mr Rees-Mogg remarked “The behaviour of a small number of Members of Parliament over years and decades has disgraced and shamed our democracy... Placing decisions of this kind in the hands of an independent expert panel is not a fundamental break with the past that reflects our continuing efforts to make Parliament a better place to work.”

These arrangements proved to be controversial as they would have allowed the House to debate the decisions reached by the independent panel. An amendment was tabled by Chris Bryant, MP (Lab) so that the House may only ratify decisions from the independent expert panel without debate. Mr Bryant “commended” Mr Rees-Mogg for bringing forward the proposal but argued “we have to declare an absolute self-denying ordinance in relation to debating a decision that has already been reached by an independent body, that has an appellate process within it, where all the evidence has been considered, where both sides of the argument have an equal opportunity to put their case... many complainants would be frightened that they would be re-victimised.” Mr Bryant’s amendment passed by 243 votes to 238.

In 2019, the House of Lords agreed that reports from the Conduct Committee relating to the behaviour of Peers, including those imposing sanctions, should be decided by the House without debate.

278 | The Parliamentarian | 2020: Issue Three | 100 years of publishing 1920-2020 | 279

| UNITED KINGDOM | The Parliamentarian | 2020: Issue Three | 100 years of publishing 1920-2020 | 279

| UNITED KINGDOM | The Parliamentarian | 2020: Issue Three | 100 years of publishing 1920-2020 | 279
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**Patron:**
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II
Head of the Commonwealth

**Executive Committee Members’ terms of membership are indicated below each name.**

**CPA Small Branches Chairperson:**

**Vice-Chairperson:**

**Treasurer:**

**Chairperson:**

**Vice-Chairperson:**

**Regional Representatives**

**Africa**

- Hon. Bernard Songa Sibalatani, M.P., Vice-Chairperson of the National Council, Namibia (2016-2021)
- Hon. Arif Baig, M.P., Speaker of the National Assembly, Pakistan (2016-2021)
- Rt. Hon. Dr. Syed Raza Rizvi, M.P., Speaker of the National Assembly, Pakistan (2019-2022)

**Asia**

- Hon. Dr. Chitthipong Worachet, M.P., President of the Senate, Thailand (2016-2021)

**Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic**


**Pacific**


**CWP Small Branches**

**Chairperson:**


**Africas**


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*Executive Committee Members’ terms extended as no CPA General Assembly held in 2018 and 2020.*

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**CPA Patron:**
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II
Head of the Commonwealth

**Vice-Patron:**
Vacant (Canada Federal)

**Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Executive Committee**

- Hon. Anthony Rota, M.P., Speaker of the House of Commons (Canada Federal)
- Rt. Hon. Aaron Mike Oquaye, M.P., Speaker of Parliament (Ghana)
- Hon. Niki Rattle
- Hon. Shandana Gulzar Khan, M.P., Chairperson of the CPA Small Branches

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**Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) and CPA Small Branches Steering Committees**

**Chairperson:**


**African**


**Australia**

- Sen. Scott Ryan, Speaker of the Senate, Australia (2016-2021)

**Caribbean, Americas and The Atlantic**

- Hon. Travone Butler, Speaker of the House of Assembly, Antigua (2017-2021)

**Pacific**

- Also vice-Chairperson of the CPA Small Branches

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- Mr. Steven Kagaiagai, Parliament of Tanzania
- Mr. Syed Shamsun Hashmi, Parliament of Pakistan
- Ms. Alex Cullum, Parliament of Australia
- Mr. Jon Davies, Parliament of the United Kingdom
- Ms. Mydebin Raha, Parliament of Malaysia

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